

THE LONDON READER

of Literature, Science, Art, and General Information.

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No. 1673.—VOL. LXV.]

FOR THE WEEK ENDING MAY 25, 1895.

[PRICE ONE PENNY.]



THE HORSE RESISTED, BUT, ENCOURAGED BY HIS RIDER, HE SPLASHED BOLDLY INTO THE WATER.

MAX RIVINGTON'S DECISION.

[A NOVELETTE.]

CHAPTER I.

"MOTHER, what shall I do! That stupid goose of a woman has not sent me a bow to match my cash!" and Madge Vernon stood in the doorway of the drawing-room, her light, frizzy hair on end, her large blue eyes wide open with dismay.

"My dear, what a pity it is you didn't find it out before!" said Mrs. Vernon, laying down her work. "It won't do for you to go into Winchester when you are going out this evening; and Benson has as much as she can manage, altering Mary's dress. I am afraid you will have to do without it."

"I could go, aunt, if you liked!" said a soft voice from the farther end of the room, as a dark head was raised from the book over which it was bending.

"You know I never like your going about alone; but, still, if Madge wants the ribbon so

particularly perhaps it will not matter for once. Take an umbrella, but be sure not to lose it, for I really can't afford to get you another. There is a train at three o'clock, which you might catch if you are quick."

"I'll do the same for you, Vera, some day, when you are wanting to look your best and can't get the wherewithal to make it possible. I'll run and cut off a tiny piece of the cash, so that you may be sure to get the right colour," and Madge flew up the stairs, whilst her cousin waited for a few more directions from her aunt.

It was not raining when Vera Stapylton reached Winchester, and she walked up the town with a brisk step, in her old garden hat and brown ulster.

She was only seventeen, with a clear complexion, and large earnest eyes of a peculiar tawny shade of brown, shaded by long black lashes.

Everyone agreed in saying that she was not pretty—which was a comfort to Mrs. Vernon, who had daughters of her own to establish in the world; but her smile lighted up her small serious face in a way that was very attractive; and her figure which had been pronounced "bony and lanky," had a certain willowy grace of its own

which lent a charm even to that peculiarly disreputable garment—a shabby brown ulster.

Looking neither to the right nor left—which her aunt had impressed upon her as the right thing to do in a town—she soon made her way to the principal linendraper's.

Producing her fragment of silk, of that curious hue known as "electric-blue," she asked for a narrower ribbon to match it; but after searching through every box of ribbon in the shop, they told her they had nothing of that colour, but would write to London for it if she wished it.

Declining this offer she crossed the road and went to another—with the same fate.

Shop after shop she went into during the course of that winter afternoon; but the electric blue was clearly not to be found in Winchester.

With good-natured patience she did her best, for she had a great objection to returning without it.

Mary had given her several other commissions with which she was more fortunate, and she came out of Messrs. Broadbridge & Co.'s with her hands full of parcels, to find that it was raining hard.

Instantly she thought of her umbrella and her

aunt's injunctions, and looked down in dismay to find that she had not got it. She hurried back into the shop in breathless haste.

"Will you be so good as to give me my umbrella, which I must have left on the counter?"

One of the shopmen immediately went to look for it, and she hastened after him to point out the exact spot where she had sat.

It was nowhere to be seen—as the man suggested, she must have evidently left it somewhere else—and she returned to the door, racking her brains to try and recollect to which shop she had been to last.

She had visited so many that she felt quite bewildered, and stood on the step with raised eyebrows, looking at the pattering rain, a picture of distress.

Smithson's was not far off, and she knew that she had bought Mary's balls there only ten minutes ago.

If she ran fast she would not get very wet; and anything was better than having to confess that she had lost it.

She darted into the road, but had to stop in the middle to let some carriages pass. As she did so she suddenly became conscious that she was sheltered from the rain, and, looking up in surprise, she found that a gentleman, with a frank, good-humoured face and broad shoulders, was holding an umbrella over her head.

"Excuse me!" he said politely; "but I was only waiting till you opened yours."

"I have lost mine!"

And she blushed like a sudden sunset—conscious that under no circumstances, short of peril of death, would her aunt allow her to talk to a stranger.

"Lost it! Where! In the town?" still keeping by her side, as she crossed to the other pavement.

"In one of the shops," she said, vaguely, and hurried into Smithson's.

Presently she came out with a wee-begone expression on her young face.

The stranger was standing in the rain, apparently studying a "Parisian novelty" in the shape of a fascinating bonnet; but as she appeared on the door-mat he turned round with a smile.

"Not found it! Tell me the name of every shop you have been to, and I'll go and look after it," he said kindly. "You cannot possibly paddle about in the rain. And you'll be doing me a service, as I have some time on my hands before the train starts."

She hesitated. The offer seemed too good to refuse. But what would her aunt say?

"I couldn't trouble you," with a sigh which showed that the answer was forced from her against her will.

"But you must!" with such a frank smile, as saved the words from seeming impertinent. "There is every reason why I should go instead of you. I have an umbrella, and you haven't; I'm a man, and you are a child. I like going, and you don't. Tell me the shops and your own name, as I am afraid I shall have to mention who the owner of the lost umbrella is, and then sit down on a chair till I come back."

She obeyed him, because there was something in his manner that compelled obedience; but she felt that she would rather ten thousand times be drenched in the rain than have to tell her aunt that she had accepted a service from a stranger.

It was late, and the growing darkness weighed upon her mind to add to everything else; for Mrs. Vernon was exceedingly particular about her girls being at home before dusk, and admitted of no excuses—especially from her niece.

She sat very still in the shop—which was nearly empty, owing to the wet afternoon—working herself up into a pitch of misery, such as an older or a more conventional girl would have thought quite ridiculous.

"Here I am!" said a cheery voice, as the stranger came back, and rubbed his boots energetically on the door-mat. "Your umbrella is nowhere to be found; but I came upon this one in my researches, which is probably about the same size, and will help to keep you dry," holding out a dainty little one with a peculiar handle,

meant to represent the gnarled trunk of a tree with two tiny little silver squirrels climbing up it.

"But it is not mine!" drawing back stiffly, aghast at the idea that he meant to make her a present of it.

"No! but you won't do it any harm by using it as far as the station—if you don't mind the trouble of carrying it. Are you going back by the 5.15?"

"Yes!" starting up; "by the very first train I can catch."

"It is late for you to be out alone," he said, gravely, as he opened the umbrella for her.

"Mrs. Vernon will think you are lost. Give me your parcels, and I will put them into my pockets," taking possession of them as he spoke.

"Do you know my aunt?" eagerly, as she stepped out into the rain.

"I know all your people!" he said, with a smile. "I knew you when you were a little bit of a thing. You used to have a predilection for sitting on my knee; and now you are afraid of walking down an open street by my side!"

She blushed again, for he seemed to have guessed her thoughts.

"Then you are an old friend, and it's all right!" she said, naively.

"Yes, it's all right," he repeated, after her. "You needn't be afraid of my picking your pockets; although you used to be uncommonly fond of picking mine."

"Who are you?" and she stopped still, putting aside her umbrella, and looking up at him with eager eyes.

"Take care! You must think of yourself, not me, or you will get wet. Curiosity has led many a woman into mischief."

"I wish you would tell me your name!"

"You have forgotten me, so I shall keep it to myself. If you only accepted me as a friend because of my name it would not be very flattering; so I should like to wait till you own me for a friend before I tell you who I am."

"But how could that be?" with a puzzled air.

"I don't know; but I will see how I can manage it. You are less afraid of me already than you were a few minutes ago!" looking down into her face with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes.

"Yes! because you are not a stranger, though you seem so; and aunt won't scold me so terribly," with childish frankness.

"Are you a blighted Cinderella?"

"For to-night I am, at all events; for Mary and Madge are going to a ball, and I shall be all alone."

"Poor child! Excuse me, but I was forgetting that you were rather more than two feet high!" he added hastily. "I have just come from the haunts of the wild Indians, and I'm nothing better than a savage myself. Take care of that puddle, and be as quick as you can, for there's the train!"

She gave an exclamation of horror, and rushed forward. He led the way through the station and on to the platform, calling out to the guard to stop as he was in the act of giving the signal to the engine-driver. The guard obeyed promptly, and Vera sank down breathlessly in the corner of a first-class carriage, only too thankful to find herself in time.

The stranger took his place opposite to her, and drew up the window within a few inches of the top, looking out into the rain as if anxious to catch the features of the flying landscape—which, however, were quite invisible on account of the darkness. Vera stole a shy glance at his face. It was certainly one of the pleasantest she had ever seen, with its broad, thoughtful brow, straight nose, and stern-set mouth—apt to soften, as she knew already, into the frankest of smiles.

"Taking notes!" he asked, as he caught her eye, "and trying to draw on an unresponsive memory!"

"I don't remember you at all!" she said, candidly, very much ashamed of the blushes that dyed her cheeks.

"Mortifying to my vanity! Did you never have a long-legged boy for your friend, whom you promised to marry when you grew up?"

"Never!" with great decision; "except Max Rivington—and he wasn't a boy at all. He went away, and never came back."

"And you cried your eyes out under the old apple-tree in the orchard?"

"I did cry a little—there's nothing to be ashamed of in that; but I made up my mind I'd never do it again!" with a little nod to show that she meant it.

"What never?"

"Never for a man!"—with supreme contempt; "he isn't worth it."

"Why, what did Rivington do to lose your esteem to the whole of his sex?" with an amused smile.

"He married a Frenchwoman, who couldn't speak a word of English, so of course he got tired of her."

"Could he help it?" with sudden gravity.

"He needn't have married her unless he liked!" with flashing eyes and scornful mouth. "And when he had done it he had no right to leave the poor thing all alone, and go to America to shoot buffaloes!"

"Perhaps after all, it was the kindest thing he could do," looking away from her indignant young face at the rain-covered window. "She mayn't have wanted him to stop."

"You don't know Max, or you wouldn't say so!" with a smile of superior knowledge. "He was the pluckiest, nicest fellow alive—papa always said so. I can't think how he could ever have been so unkind to a woman—when he was with us he wouldn't hurt a fly."

"And now he kills buffaloes! Evidently matrimony disagreed with him, or he disagreed with matrimony."

"I wish he had never married!" purring up her full red lips.

"So does he—at least I should think so. Would you like to have him back again?"

"Not at all! He wouldn't be the same Max to me; and I don't want a spoilt copy."

"I'll tell him so!"

"Do you know him?" breathlessly, her eyes fastened on his bronzed face with a yearning glance, which showed that the old affection was still alive, whatever she might say to the contrary.

"Yes; and—unlike you—I pity him. But here we are at Wetherstone!" letting down the window, and throwing open the door.

He got out and offered her his hand, which she scarcely touched, as she sprang light as a feather, to the muddy platform.

"Thank you for your umbrella!" she said hurriedly, trying to push it into his hand.

"You want it opened! There it is. I wish I had a carriage here, to save you the walk in the rain!"

"We live close to the station," trying to decline it, as he held it out.

"One step or twenty, it does not make much difference. I will ask you for it when next we meet, on condition that you use it every time it rains in between. Kind regards to Mrs. Vernon!" and he jumped into the train before she had time to answer him.

She looked vaguely after it as it steamed slowly out of the station, and then bent her steps homeward, her young heart beating with excitement as she held the stranger's dainty umbrella over her shabby hat.

CHAPTER II.

"I NEVER heard anything so extraordinary in my life!" exclaimed Mrs. Vernon, her usually pale face flushed with wrath. "Evidently an utter impostor and low adventurer! Really, Vera, it is very annoying that I can never trust you out by yourself without some accident happening. The very last time you went to Winchester you dropped your umbrella in the middle of the road, and Captain Winthrop, the fastest man in the regiment, ran after you with it, and made an excuse for beginning an acquaintance."

"It was not a beginning but an end!" with her small head held high, and her eyes flashing. "Madge had introduced me to him at



the Rectory dance. But he won't speak to me again!"

"But this is worse than anything!"—in real distress. "You ought not to have gone out in that disreputable hat and ulster. It makes people think so little of you."

"I have nothing else to wear. But if people are only going to care for me if I have good clothes on my back they may think what they please. Mary will be wanting this tulle, so perhaps I had better take it to her," turning to leave the room, her lips quivering.

"Stay, my dear; you had better give that umbrella into my charge, and I will ask your uncle what we are to do with it."

"I am to use it whenever it rains!" holding it tight.

"Nonsense, my dear! It was very impertinent of him to suggest such a thing; and I am surprised at your thinking of accepting a present from a man you meet in the streets!"

"It was not a present, or I would have thrown it back into the train!" with great indignation. "But I am to use it till he comes back, and I mean to! He says he knew me long ago, and all of you."

"The men of the present day will say anything. Let him come and call here if he knows us. Why, the impostor wouldn't even tell you his name! Go upstairs, and take off your things, and don't let me hear another word about him!"

Vera was only too glad to escape from the room with her prize in her hand.

She dried it most carefully with her towel, although she left her dripping ulster on the floor, and her hat unnoticed on a chair.

She was rubbing the small silver squirrels with a piece of kid when Jane, the housemaid, looked into the room, and said Miss Madge wanted to see Miss Stapilton at once.

Madge was sitting at her dressing-table with a cloud of light hair hanging over her shoulders, and looked up with an eager inquiry after her piece of ribbon, as Vera came in.

"What an idiotic sort of place Winchester is!" she exclaimed, impatiently. "You never can get what you want. But it doesn't much matter, for mamma has picked me some lovely white lilacs out of the conservatory, which will be much better than a bow. Sit down on that chair," pointing to one by the side of the table, "and tell me of all your adventures. Is it true, as mamma says, that somebody was very rude to you?"

The colour mounted into Vera's cheeks.

"Certainly not! Somebody was most kind, and I shall be delighted to see him again!"

"Employ yourself by arranging my flowers, and tell me all about it," said Madge, combing out her hair.

She listened with intense interest till the story was ended.

"It is just like a chapter out of a novel. Depend upon it he has stolen that umbrella and murdered the owner into the bargain. Send it back to him at once. Oh! I forget, though—you don't know his address! That's awkward—very awkward! Upon my word, I don't like its being the house."

"How can you be so ridiculous when he says he knew Aunt Mary and all of you. And me, too, when I was a little girl!"

"Of course that's the way they all begin," with a knowing shake of the head. "If I were you I should be inclined to send that umbrella down to the police-station!"

"I shall do nothing of the kind," indignantly. "I think it is very wrong to be so suspicious!"

"Dear, dear, preach a sermon about it at once!" with a mocking laugh. "But, stolen or not stolen, I should very much like to see it. Do, there's a good girl. Run and fetch it!"

The umbrella was fetched and admired greatly. Mary, a quiet-looking girl, with dark hair brushed straight off her gentle face into a knot behind, came in to inspect it and to hear an account of all that had happened.

The subject was not mentioned at dinner, but Mrs. Vernon looked so severe that Vera felt sure that she had it in her thoughts.

Mr. Vernon, a prosperous solicitor, with a ruddy, benevolent countenance—more like a country squire than a lawyer—rallied his daughters on the conquests they intended to make at the ball, and told them to be sure and not keep the horse waiting any time out in the cold.

"I believe you will meet Sir Philip Wentworth's heir!" he said, rubbing his hands together with a glance at his favourite daughter. "Now, if you could capture him, Madge, it would be doing a good stroke of business."

"I am sure I shan't try!" with a toss of her curly head. "I daresay he is a perfect monster of ugliness. Rich men always pay in their looks for what they have got in their pockets!"

"They pay their bills, which is satisfactory. They say that he has spent half his life in the wilds."

"Then he won't be half civilized. I like a London man—people get so rough and uninteresting in the country."

"You shouldn't say such things," said Mrs. Vernon, reprovingly. "The London polish would not stand the wear and tear of private life, and an amiable disposition is worth much more than a dash of easily rubbed-off veneer!"

"Bad tempers grow in the country much more than in town. Here we have such plenty of time to think over our grievances that we haven't a chance of forgetting them!" said Madge, with a mischievous look in her eyes. "Vera, shall I come and wake you up to tell you of all the fun we've had?"

"Of course you will. You always do."

"But to-night I thought your dreams would be too pleasant."

"Why?" with a pretence of not knowing what was meant, but the treacherous colour betrayed her.

"You had much better go quietly to bed, as Mary does," said Mrs. Vernon.

"Perhaps, because I never have anything remarkable to tell," and Mary smiled across at her sister, who bounded up from the table with a horrified look at the clock, and hurried off to dress.

Vera was fast asleep when, exactly at half-past two, the carriage drove up to the door and its occupants, having possessed themselves of their bedroom candles, and answered the sleepy inquiries of the maid who had sat up for them, made their way sleepily upstairs; but she sat up and rubbed her eyes when the door of her room opened and in fluttered a radiant being in electric blue, with withered lilacs on her breast and wildly dishevelled hair, and asked with vivid interest—

"Well, Madge?"

"Glorious fun! Two or three partners for every dance; and Dare was there"—a conscious smile hovered round her mouth. "He was standing at the door when we came in, and literally pounced upon me; but just because he was so anxious I wouldn't let him have a single dance till the evening was half over. He was so savage!"

"What a horrid shame! If I were he, I wouldn't speak to you again."

"He wouldn't unless he likes," with a toss of her head. "You should have seen his face when I danced four times running with 'the barber's block.' It was splendid! Mary said she did not know what was the matter with him, and asked if he had just come from a funeral."

"I wish I had been there," subsiding under the bedclothes.

"Why? What good would you have done?"

"I would have told Dare to pay you out in your own coin."

"And much he would have cared if you had, you little goose. You don't understand these things. If you want a man to like you look at him as if you loved him, but say nothing. When he is quite head over ears you can turn your back upon him safely, and he'll only like you all the more." A prodigious yawn followed this piece of worldly wisdom, but she had not finished her budget, so she sat down on the edge of the bed to rest her weary legs. "Do you know,"

with another yawn, "I have found out all about your umbrella! It is just as I said."

Up jumped Vera, her large eyes wide open in a moment.

"It was stolen from Miss Hawshaw's carriage when she was shopping to-day; and when mamma told her of yours, she said she should like to look at it, as hers had little silver things on the handle. So you see I was quite right; he is an impostor and a thief, and we are to take over the stolen property to the Hawshaws to-morrow. Good night, or rather good-morning."

"It shan't go!" cried Vera, excitedly. "He is no more a thief than I am, and I shall keep it here, in my own possession, till he comes to ask for it." Then she flung herself down on the pillow, and pulled the clothes over her head, as if to put an end to the conversation.

"Take care, child, or I shall really think you have lost your heart to the man. Having given you something to dream of I will take myself off. I feel so cold—I wish I were in bed," with a shiver, as she went out of the room.

Instead of giving her something to dream of she had effectually taken away Vera's capacities for sleep, and she tossed about restlessly, thinking of the stranger's kind eyes, and the umbrella which he had entrusted to her charge. Nothing on earth should induce her to part with it!

CHAPTER III.

"If you like to take me, aunt, I will go to Mrs. Hawshaw's myself, and hear from her own lips an exact description of her lost umbrella," said Vera, firmly, though her heart was beating fast, and her lips quivered; "but I will never let this one go unless she can swear that it is hers, for I could stake my head that it wasn't."

"What an expression! stake your head! just as if you had been a Californian gambler," exclaimed Mrs. Vernon, with uplifted hands.

"She is suiting herself for her friend from the wilds," said Madge, mischievously.

"Hush! this is no laughing matter. Vera, I am quite ashamed of you for your obstinacy. Why you should not trust your umbrella to me I cannot conceive; but as you seem to have a prejudice against it I will take you to the Hall myself. The carriage will be round at three o'clock, and take care to make yourself as presentable as you can," with a heavy sigh, as if she did not think the effort would be striking.

Vera left the room; her passions had been up to boiling-point during the whole interview, and it was with the utmost difficulty that she had been able to keep from an explosion.

Because somebody had actually gone out of the way to do a kindness to the lonely uncareful girl he was to be dubbed a thief and an adventurer, as if nobody else could think of her but some outcast from society!

It was always the way—everything she prized was scoffed at—every idol she raised to herself out of the most promising materials that came to hand was thrown down and shattered to pieces.

Thinking over her pangs and disappointments, with unusual bitterness, she burst into a flood of tears, just as the luncheon-bell rang.

Recollecting, with dismay, that she ought to put in an appearance, she ran to the glass, and so inspected her doleful visage.

It was quite impossible to go down and meet the inquisitive glances which would be sure to be fired at her, so she resigned herself to go without—not a pleasant alternative to a young and healthy digestion.

Time passed on; the rest of the family were heard assembling.

Tommy, Jem and little Alice came running down the passage—shouting and laughing as they went, followed by the gentle rustle of Mrs. Vernon's silk dress.

After about half an hour, during which time she did the best she could to disguise herself, she began to forget her sorrow and remember her hunger; but pride had to suffer pain, as it always will do so long as this world lasts.

Great was her relief when, a little later, the unmistakable jingle of a tray against her door

showed that, although she was in disgrace, no one exactly wished to starve her.

She opened her door quickly, and there stood her little cousin Jemmy, with her luncheon carried on his sturdy arms.

"My goodness! how you have been blubbering!" he exclaimed, with the frankness of childhood, as he gave up the tray. "Mother says you are to be sure and get ready for the carriage."

Having delivered his message he quickly vanished, and Vera, having digested her tears, began slowly to do the same by her luncheon.

The Hall was considered one of the finest places in Blankshire, and the Hawshaws were even prouder of their genealogical tree than of the beautiful avenue of elm-trees which swept in a grand wave up to the front of the house.

"Vera," said Mrs. Vernon gravely, "I don't suppose you want to be taken for a scolded child. With your red eyes and swollen lids you will only be laughed at, so I will tell Mrs. Hawshaw that I took the liberty to send you for a walk in the grounds, as you had had no exercise to-day."

"But this!" looking down at the umbrella. Was she to resign it after all without a struggle?

"That you can give me!" holding out her hand for it. "I shall simply tell Miss Hawshaw that you found it in Winchester, without going into particulars, and I promise you that she shall not have it unless she can say it is hers. Here we are, so not another word. The fresh air will take away the traces of your tears; and if we stay to tea I will have you sent for."

There was nothing to be done but submit. By her own foolish weakness she had made it impossible for her to carry her point; for, careless as she professed to be of the opinion of the world, yet she felt she could not enter the solemn drawing-room of the Hall with red eyes.

Very disconsolately she walked about the grounds, her best clothes having apparently been put on for the benefit of the trees and bushes.

Her dark-brown, close-fitting dress and jacket, with the dark toque as the top of her dark curls, were especially becoming to her, and a knot of yellow chrysanthemums in her button-hole gave the required touch of colour to enliven the whole.

There is nothing particularly attractive in the nicest garden in November. The flowers are few and far between, and the walks are generally damp. A "constitutional" amongst the snails and slugs is consequently the reverse of cheerful.

Vera Stapylton was a girl who could not bear the semblance of restraint, although she would have done most willing service to any one who had taken the trouble to win her wilful heart. The stiff walks round the diamond-shaped beds in the flower-garden seemed to fetter her spirit, and, with a quick look over her shoulder to see if any one were about, she opened a gate into the park, and ran like a child set free over the long, wet grass to the side of the brook. Every scrap of polish was immediately washed off her boots, but she did not think of them in her eager admiration of the wooded glen, into which she had made her way.

At her feet ran the gurgling waters, splashing, in playful fury, over large slate-coloured boulders, which tried to arrest their progress. They were spanned by a grey, stone bridge, with a single arch, from which hung long wreaths of ivy, as if anxious to dip their shining leaves in the stream. On the other side a bank of fir trees rose against the wintry sky, looking like an army of shadows lying in wait for the setting of the sun.

Vera had just conceived a passion for carving; and one particular trail of ivy, hanging from the bridge, attracted her eye, as the very thing she wanted to copy for the frame of a picture. With no thought for possible damage to her Sunday dress, or for the aunt who might be wishing to return home without delay, she resolved to get it if she could. She put her small foot into a crevice of the stone-work, and hoisted herself up, till she looked like a monstrous bumble-bee stuck on the side of the bridge. Slowly and very carefully she felt

her way from one narrow ledge to another till she heard the waters under her feet, and knew that she must almost have reached the piece with the pointed leaves which she especially coveted. The ivy above her head nearly knocked her hat off, and obstructed her sight, so she could only go by touch and hearing.

With great caution she loosened one hand from the stem to which she was clinging, and stretched it out to reach the spray. She touched it but could not break it. It seemed absurd to go back, after so much trouble, without getting it—it would be as bad as that tiresome piece of ribbon the other day—and she could not bear to be beaten, be the difficulty however great. Standing on the tip of her right foot she stretched forward, and bit the stalk in two with her small white teeth.

Then she tried to regain her balance, but her foot slipped from the narrow ledge, and the next moment she was hanging over the angry stream, her life depending on the stem of ivy to which she was clinging not giving way before help came, or her arms failed to have the power of sustaining the weight of her body.

She tried to scream, but her voice seemed choked. "Heaven have mercy!" was the only prayer she could think of as a whole bewildering rush of thoughts passed like a flash of lightning through her mind.

She had been so wicked, wilful, and passionate. And now Eternity was near. Death was waiting for her with open arms, and she was not ready to go. The pain in the muscles of her arms grew intense, a cold dew gathered on her forehead, the splash of the waters seemed to rise higher and higher, as if they were in such a hurry for their prey, that they had raised their waves to clutch her. Her lips were parted, her head thrown back, her face already white as death. A dimness had come like a mist before her eyes. The power of struggling seemed to have gone from her; her fingers were numb and only mechanically retained their hold.

A shout from the bank told her that help was near, when she thought it would never come. A gentleman riding along the bridge-path on the bank had caught sight of the girl's figure hanging from the centre of the bridge.

Amazed to see anyone in such a position he realised the danger at once, and spurred his horse into the stream.

The horse reared, but, encouraged by his rider, he splashed boldly into the water and brought his master almost under the bridge.

Grasping the reins with his left hand, as he steadied himself with the right, he stood up in the saddle like a circus-rider, and grasped the pendant form round the waist.

Vera's hands relaxed their hold. She fell back involuntarily into his arms, the horse plunged forward, and precipitated both saved and saviour into the seething waters.

Neither uttered a cry, but sank without a sound, the stream closing instantly over their heads.

The man was still holding on to the bridle of his horse—the girl had a piece of ivy clutched tight in her hand.

There was no one to see—no one to help. The sun had set, and the shadows had crept out of the firwood, and darkened gleamy stream and dewy uplands.

Breathing hard like a gallant St. Bernard, the man struggled on to the bank, about a hundred yards lower down, with the girl's dripping form in his arms.

He laid her gently down on the withered ferns, then turned to give a hand to his brave horse, who was trying to gain a foothold on the broken earth, but could not manage it without his master's help.

Having established his favourite safely on terra firma, and thrown the bridle hastily over a post, he knelt down by Vera's side, and gently raised her head.

A pitiful smile crossed his face.

"Poor child," he muttered, "I am glad I was in time."

Then finding that she remained perfectly motionless, with the dark lashes glued to the colourless cheeks, he took her up in his arms,

and made his way towards the distant lights of the Hall with rapid strides.

Water was dripping from every one of his garments as well as from Vera's; but, nevertheless, with the easy air of one who was not accustomed to give an account of his actions, he walked straight into the cheerful morning-room, where Mrs. and Miss Hawshaw and their friend were quietly enjoying a cup of tea, and placing his damp burden on the nearest sofa said composedly,—

"Excuse my unceremonious entry, but I found this young lady in the water, so I thought I had better bring her in. I can't bring her to, but perhaps you can!"

Mrs. Vernon started up with a cry. Mrs. Hawshaw exclaimed,—

"Good Heavens! Sir Piers, is she drowned?" whilst Miss Hawshaw looked at him instead of Vera.

"You have been almost drowned yourself, though you don't say so."

"I am accustomed to it," with a careless shrug of his shoulders.

"Oh! my poor child, speak to me!" and Mrs. Vernon knelt down by the sofa sobbing hysterically. "She's dead! she's dead! and what will her father say to me?"

Mrs. and Miss Hawshaw ran out of the room to fetch brandy and other restoratives, whilst Sir Piers, stooping down gently, detached the crushed brown toque from the drooping curls.

"See, she is moving already! You mustn't frighten her when she first wakes up. Just go outside the door, and leave her to me till you are calmer."

Remonstrating faintly, Mrs. Vernon obeyed him like a child, for there was something in the baronet's manner which few women could withstand.

When he was left alone with Vera he knelt down by her side, and, looking compassionately into the poor pale face, said softly,—

"Vera, you haven't forgotten me?"

Slowly the dark eyes opened, and looked wonderingly into his.

"Don't believe what they tell you!" he whispered, hurriedly. "It was Max who saved you!"

As the others came in he hastily rose to his feet.

"There is no further cause for alarm. Put her between some warm blankets as soon as you can. I must be off to look after my horse."

"But you will catch your death of cold! shan't we send for it?"

"Thanks! a quick ride home will do me all the good in the world," and with a comprehensive bow he left the room.

CHAPTER IV.

"WHERE'S Max?" were the first words uttered by Vera Stapylton as she opened her large eyes, and looked wistfully round the handsomely-furnished room, as if in search of some one whom she had fondly expected to see.

"Max, my dear!" exclaimed her aunt, in bewilderment. "There is nobody of that name here."

"Max saved me!" she said, persistently, still looking as if she thought her old friend was lurking behind her aunt's back.

"The only Max I know of"—explanatorily to Mrs. Hawshaw—"is Max Rivington, and I haven't heard of him for I don't know how many years. What could have put it into her head I can't think."

"I saw his eyes—such kind eyes they always were; and I heard his voice. He said 'Max saved you!' and then he went. But he'll come again, won't he?"—anxiously, as she let her head fall back on the sofa.

"Yes! dear; he will come again!" said Mrs. Hawshaw, kindly, ready to affirm anything that was most comforting. "But now, if you think you can manage to stand, we will take you upstairs to a room that has been prepared for you, and have these wet things removed."

"Am I to stay here?" with a frightened look at her aunt.

"Yes! dear. Mrs. Hawkshaw thinks it would be better for you than driving home. As soon as I have seen you safely in bed I must hurry back, or your uncle will think I am lost!"

Staggering a little, Vera rose to her feet, and, holding tight on to Miss Hawkshaw's arm, contrived to get as far as the door.

When there she stopped, and looking over her shoulder at her aunt, asked,—

"Where is my umbrella?"

The question made them all laugh. It seemed so ridiculous that any one just rescued from death should think of such an ordinary, prosaic detail of an umbrella.

"It is quite safe!" said her supporter, with a smile. "And I can lay no claim to it. Mine had little silver mice, not squirrels, and was not such thick silk. Mother, perhaps you had better bring it up with us to ease Miss Stapilton's mind."

Mrs. Hawkshaw did as she was bid, and the umbrella was laid at the foot of the bed.

"I will send for her things early to-morrow morning; and if she is not quite herself I shall ask Dr. Chinnery to look in, so you can make yourself quite easy."

"You are very kind, but I don't like to trouble you," said Mrs. Vernon, her mind flying directly to the unsatisfactory state of her niece's wardrobe. If the brown dress were *hors de combat* she was really afraid that there was nothing respectable to take its place. Perhaps Mary would be able to manage something; she was the general referee in all matters of difficulty.

"After all," said Mrs. Hawkshaw, who guessed what was troubling Mrs. Vernon's mind, "we have everything she can want here, so I don't see why we should send over to you. And if her own dress is spoilt Kate is just about the same height, and could easily lend her one of hers."

The solicitor's wife gave a sigh of relief and expressed her gratitude.

"How she fell into the river I can't imagine, but I never did see such a child for getting into mischief!"

"Hush! not a word of that," with a kindly smile at the invalid, whose sensitive face had flushed at the remark. "Leave her to me for a few days, and I'll send her back, please Heaven, as well and strong as ever."

Vera's father, Colonel Stapilton, of the Royal Engineers, now far away in India, had once been the idol of Mrs. Hawkshaw's heart; and though they had parted by a foolish quarrel, and each had married some one else, yet she still retained a tender feeling for his daughter, whose soft dark eyes reminded her of the days of her youth.

It was some time before Vera recovered from the effects of her accident, and day after day she was content to lie in utter idleness on the sofa in the library, with a book or a piece of work on her lap, her thoughts roaming far and wide over the vast field of a girl's imagination.

Her cousins had been over once, full of curiosity about her second adventure, but they could elicit nothing from her except that when she was hanging from the bridge, like a dancer depending from the tight-rope, she dropped, as she thought, into the hungry waters, and was caught in somebody's arms.

Then there was a sudden fall, and she knew nothing except that the cold stream closed over her head.

When she woke up a man was by her side who had Max Rivington's eyes, and yet he was like the stranger who protected her in the rain. He told her that Max had saved her, but nobody else would believe it.

"I should think not," said Madge, promptly. "It is all over the place that Mrs. Vernon's niece tried to drown herself, but was saved by Sir Piers Wentworth."

The colour rushed into Vera's cheeks.

"I wish they would not be so foolish. But, Madge—in a low voice—"how about Mr. Greville?"

"Oh, poor old Dare! I think he's going off to Australia. He's very much in the dumps, and

so am I. Oh, Vera, I wanted you so the other day. I thought perhaps you would have told him that I don't care a rap for 'the barber's block.' Just because I danced with Clement Sharp four times running—he—he—made up his mind that I'm going to marry him."

There were tears in the blue eyes, though she brushed them away hastily, and began to hum a tune.

"Send him over here with a skein of silk or a message."

"He never comes near me or I would; but he tells Mary that he is coming to inquire after you, so perhaps you will see him before I shall. Mamma has been cross as two pins. I'm sure I don't know why. But ta-ta—there's Mary calling me, so I must be off."

The next morning Vera was feeling very weak and fit for nothing as she lay on the sofa.

Mrs. Hawkshaw and her daughter had driven into Winchester to do some shopping, promising to return in time for luncheon.

The sky was overcast as with a promise of snow, but the fire sent a cheerful light over the chairs and writing-tables and the long rows of bright bindings in the bookshelves.

Weakness made her low-spirited, and she began to think over her life as most unsatisfactory.

What good did she do on earth? Her father, away in India, forgot her so completely that he could not even remember to send her sufficient money to supply her with proper clothing, or to provide for a decent education.

Any extra had to be furnished out of her aunt's purse; and Vera from early youth had been made to understand that she had only been taken in as a favour, and retained in that well-filled household out of charity.

Her mother died long years ago, and nobody seemed to want her child.

The part of Cinderella is a dreary part to play if the fairy godmother forgets to make her appearance on the scene.

There was a tap at the door, and a form that she recognised at once as "the stranger's" appeared on the threshold.

"Mrs. and Miss Hawkshaw are out, but I was told that I should find you in the library. Send me away if you don't want me."

"I do want you!" eagerly, dropping her feet to the ground.

He came in and shut the door after him.

"Is it true that you are Sir Piers Wentworth?" her large eyes fixed upon his face.

"Put up your feet again or I will not answer you. I did not come to disturb you."

He waited till she had obeyed him, then drew a low chair towards the sofa, in such a position that he could study every change in her face.

"But is it true?"

"They call me Sir Piers," he said, carelessly, "since I inherited the old man's fortune; but you may call me by any other name you like."

"And is it true that it was not you that saved me but Max Rivington?"

He stroked his silky beard thoughtfully. "Who told you so?"

"I cannot tell, I was so confused," raising her hand to her forehead. "Part of his face seemed yours, and the eyes his."

"Strange! It could not be two men rolled into one. But was it the thought of Max that brought those tears to your eyes which I saw on your lashes as I came in?"

She turned away, blushing.

"Not Max alone—but everything."

"Tell me something—everything is vague."

"As you seem to know everything, you must know that it isn't the pleasantest thing in the world to be conscious that nobody wants you," and the tears came again, but she dashed them impatiently away.

"Nobody!—not even your father!"

"Papa has his profession, and cares for nothing else!"

"Your aunt?"

"She has her children and her husband, and they are quite enough for her."

"Surely you have some friends!" compassion in his voice and eyes.

"If ever I have a friend there is always some."

thing against her. And grown-up men don't care for a girl like me—"

"Don't they?" with a smile. "I should have thought they might."

"Max Rivington is a grown-up man, and I can tell you that his first thought on coming to England was to find out the little girl who had promised to be his wife."

A smile played round her lips that made her look positively pretty, but it passed away like an April gleam, and the eyes resumed their sadness.

"His French wife—has he brought her with him?"

"No, he has left her behind in her grave!" looking at the fire with a frown of pain.

"She's dead!" starting up, with wide open eyes. "Poor thing, she has lost him after all—perhaps he was sorry when too late."

"Sorry for what?" and his voice sounded unusually harsh. "He was more sinned against than sinning."

"But he left her all alone—and that was dreadful."

"Not dreadful at all, if you knew the truth. I tell you marriage may be worse than death itself, but he broke off abruptly. "You will know for yourself some day, and perhaps mayn't find it a Paradise."

She shook her head.

"But you promised to marry Max!"

"He broke his promise—of course it was all nonsense—and it did not matter in the least, but I feel that I shall never marry anyone else."

"I will tell him so!" his blue eyes shining with amusement.

"No, tell him that it was good of him to save me, but I wish he hadn't done it."

"I couldn't take such a message as that. You weren't as doleful as this the other day in the rain," looking at her as if he would read the reason for the change in her expression. "Do you feel ill, or what is it?"

"Not ill exactly," with a sigh, "but so tired, as if I never should feel rested again."

"That is the effect of the shock; you will recover from it soon. Is there anything you can think of that would act as a tonic?"

"The sight of some real old friend—who once was fond of me," with a wistful glance into the blaze.

"Such as Max, for instance? I am an old friend, Vera; won't I do instead?" And getting up from his chair, he took her slender hand in his, and kneeling down, looked straight into her troubled face.

She met his eyes once, then turned away with a vivid, overpowering blush. She would have given anything at the moment to be miles and miles away.

"I knew you years ago," he went on in that full, rich voice which seemed to wake some chord of memory in her throbbing heart. "I was as fond of you as I could be. You have forgotten me, but I remembered you wherever I went; and whatever I did your childish face seemed a small stay to beckon me home when I was sick at heart, deceived—betrayed. I thought, like you, it would be pleasant to die, and get out of the wonders and bothers that pursued me; but I remembered a pure-hearted little child who would be sure to cry for me when I was gone, and I hadn't the heart to do it." His arm stole round her trembling figure, his handsome face bent close to her. "You like me, surely, as well as Max? and I will be your friend instead of him. Let us seal the compact," and he touched her hand with his lips.

Desperately indignant, with crimson cheeks and sparkling eyes, she pushed him away.

"No—no—no! I'll never like you. I wish—I wish to Heaven I had never seen you!" and nearly maddened by conflicting emotions which she did not understand, she covered her face with her shaky fingers.

"Don't be alarmed, I'm going. I thought you would be glad of a friend." And he stood up, straight and tall before her as a pine. "The next time I meet you jumping from a bridge I will try to remember to leave you alone." Then he strode towards the door, casting a flushing

look from his indignant eyes, which seemed to scorch her as it fell.

"It was Max who saved me—not you!" she cried out, in self-defence.

"It was I! Do you think I would tell you a lie?"

"Oh! come back!" overcome by a stinging sense of ingratitude; "come back, and let me thank you."

"You have done that once too often already. Good morning, Miss Stapylton. I can at least please you by taking care that you shall not see me again," and with a low bow he turned to leave the room.

She scrambled to her feet, and held out her hands like a child.

"Don't go!" she said, faintly, and hung her head.

He stood still with his hand on the handle of the door.

"Why did you say you wished you had never seen me?"

Her head bent still lower.

"Because Max was away—and I thought you seemed to wish me make me like you best."

"Then he came towards her with a smile. 'You thought me a disloyal friend!'"

She nodded as she sat down on the sofa.

"You have forgiven him for his marriage?"

"I was not angry at his marriage, and you say there were reasons why it was best that he should leave her!"

Again a shadow crossed his face.

"We will not talk of that! Shall we agree to this? I am to be your friend and adviser during his absence, and then at the end of a year I shall bring him to you."

"A year is a long time."

"By that time you will have grown out of a child into a woman. You will have finished your lessons. Your mind will be stored with all sorts of knowledge. You will have mixed in such society as there is, and you will be able to test the difference between new friends and old."

"I shall not need to do that, and Max will have forgotten me."

A sudden smile lightened up the gravity of his face.

"If he should, I will remind him; but remember that you must on no account marry before the year is out."

"Marry!" drawing back as if there was a sting in the mere thought of it. "I will never have a husband—but I always want a friend."

"So long as I live you shall not be without one!" very gravely, as if his whole heart were in the words.

She looked up at him, her eyes shining.

"You are better to me than I deserve."

"Yes; you would always dispense with me if you could—even in the rain—or the river."

"Ah! the umbrella! I had forgotten it."

"I shall leave it with you for a year, to remind you of your promise."

"I shall not even be asked to break it. You seem to forget what I am," she broke out passionately, as if the conversation seemed like a mockery of her real position. "A plain, poverty-stricken waif and stray, who has no hole ready or appropriate for her in the world but a grave!"

"You are talking nonsense!" he said hastily.

"A generous, unselfish, loving nature like yours is worth far more than a balance at the bank. If you won't believe me I shall punish you!"

Then he left her.

CHAPTER V.

Mrs. HAWKSHAW would not let Vera Stapylton go back to the Vernons till after a small dance which was to be given at the Hall on Christmas Eve.

She was quite content to stay, but her aunt made many remonstrances for conscience' sake and it was at last agreed that she should pursue her studies with a very clever young lady, Fraulein Schmidt, who was governess to Emily Hawkshaw, the youngest daughter.

Many complaints had been made at Wetherstone House of Miss Stapylton's inattention and want of interest, but a sudden change had come

over the refractory pupil, and she was so anxious to work with unflagging industry that Mrs. Hawkshaw was afraid she would injure her newly-recovered health.

Sometimes Sir Piers would look in, and in a half-playful fashion explain some scientific problem from his own intimate acquaintance with the secrets of nature; or he would offer to read a German play with her, merely to revive his recollections of Schiller.

Under such tuition it was no wonder that the girl's hitherto neglected intellect should make great strides.

It was so new and delightful to her to be watched with real interest, and not simply out of a sense of duty, that she did not care how hard she worked to win a word of praise.

Max Rivington was devoted to music, and she sat day after day in the twilight playing soft German melodies, such as Sir Piers assured her he liked best.

She loved to imagine that he was listening to her from some spot far away. There was something infinitely pathetic in the girl's silent struggle after an unforfeited friendship.

Everything was done and thought of with the idea of pleasing Max when he should come back to find the child he was so fond of grown up into a girl, ready to sympathise with him in all his tastes.

Day by day Vera improved, not only in mind but appearance.

There was some subtle charm in the luminous dark eyes, in the ever-changing smile, which made Sir Piers Wentworth, as Kate Hawkshaw noticed with a sigh, often stay on when he meant to say good-bye.

Vera had another visitor, Mr. Dare Grenville, who came to inquire after her health, and stayed to confide to her his sorrows.

He was a manly-looking young fellow, with flashing black eyes, and a sensitive mouth. He had fallen in love with Madge Vernon at a picnic two years ago, and the willful little coquette had taken a pleasure in teasing him ever since. Vera's advice was that he should pretend not to care.

"Easy enough, Miss Stapylton, when your heart's not in it," he said, disconsolately; "but the bother of it is it drives me mad to see her going on with an empty-headed fop like Clement Sharp."

"Pretend to like it, and she is sure to come round," said Vera, sagaciously. "You don't know Madge as well as I do. If she sees you flirting with someone else on Christmas Eve she will be desperately in love with you before the evening is over, and you might make it up after supper."

"By Jove! I'll try," his face lighting up; "and if it all comes right, there's nothing on earth that I won't do for you."

After this he took up his hat and went; and Vera looked forward to "the party with some excitement, anxious to see if he would really have the resolution to act upon her advice.

When Christmas Eve actually arrived Vera was so busy helping the Miss Hawkshaws with the necessary decorations for the festive occasion that she almost forgot Dare Grenville and his sorrows till she saw him standing in the doorway of the drawing-room, which had been cleared out ready for the dancing, in an irreproachable white tie, with a woe-begone expression on his face.

He came towards her directly he caught her eye, and begged the honour of the first dance. Madge, who was standing close by, coloured deeply as she heard the request, and instantly engaged herself to Mr. Sharp.

Before Vera could answer Sir Piers Wentworth looked Grenville straight in the face with a good-humoured smile.

"Mine; you must fix on another."

"Not really! Miss Stapylton, is this true?"

"By all the laws of salvage. The first is mine."

"Does Miss Stapylton acknowledge the claim?"

"How can I help it? A dance is a poor enough return for the life he saved."

"Ah! I forgot. Then give me another," putting his name down for the second.

"I forget nothing when it is for my own advantage," and Sir Piers led his blushing partner away.

"Humph! Is that a case?" queried Clement Sharp, with a glance at their retreating figures.

"A case! No. How can you be so ridiculous! That is only Vera Stapylton. The man is the new owner of Wildegrave."

"If he means nothing he shouldn't look at her like that."

"Are you so very careful?" looking up at him coquettishly.

"As careful as an old woman when I'm not talking to you."

"Why not then?" innocently regarding her face."

"Because my eyes won't say half as much as I mean. The music has begun—so why shouldn't we?"

Mrs. Vernon watched her niece with wonder and jealousy. She had always regarded her as a lanky, over-grown girl, with no pretensions to good looks, and now without any warning the ugly duckling had turned into a swan. Animation lent new beauty to a face that had ever had an interest of its own, and freshly-gained assurance gave a certain grace to her movements. The perfect shape of her head and neck was shown off by the way in which Mrs. Hawkshaw had insisted upon having her hair piled up in short curls, ending in a carefully-arranged fringe on her broad forehead, and the single red camellia nestling amongst its clusters was especially becoming. Her dress was simplicity itself, and not to be compared in splendour with that of Madge; but yet Mrs. Vernon looked away from "the beauty of the family" with a feeling of dissatisfaction as Vera passed by.

"Who is that pretty little girl with the red flower? Do introduce me if you know her!" Mrs. Vernon bit her lip, for the speaker, Mr. Francis Pearson, was the son of a millionaire, and Mary was standing by her side without a partner.

"She is my niece, Miss Stapylton. Of course I will present you, if you wish it; but this is her first appearance in the world, and I am afraid you will find her very young."

"So much the better! Everyone in these days is ten years older than he really is; it will be a comfort to find anyone who is actually juvenile."

The introduction was speedily effected, and Mr. Pearson wrote his name on the only two blanks he could find on Vera's card. He danced well, and was tolerably agreeable; but she was glad to shake him off when Dare came to claim her for his partner.

"It is no good, Miss Stapylton," shaking his head, dolefully, as they sat together in a quiet corner of the conservatory; "I have only succeeded in making her hate me, and I should like to cut my throat," with a grim smile, "only it would make such a nasty mess!"

"Don't do that just yet. I think it looks most promising. She has danced with him so often that she must be sick to death of him."

"Often! of course she has! A dozen times at the very least. I wish to Heaven I had never come!" and he gnawed the end of his moustache savagely.

"Wait till the end. Just after supper, when the first extra strikes up, go to her, and see if she is not very glad to have you back!"

He looked doubtful.

"Oh, dear; if you only knew her as well as I do. Listen! Mr. Grenville; bend down your ear, for I want to whisper—she almost told me that she liked you far the best."

In his anxiety to catch every word he had stooped his head so near to hers that his close-cropped curls nearly brushed her cheeks. Just at that moment Sir Piers entered the conservatory, and peered through the trees of camellias to see if Vera was there. He saw that she was, and with her head so close to Grenville's that they nearly touched.

The attitude was suggestive, and he stepped back with a frown. Vera did not know what the effort had cost her, but as it was she felt

repaid when she saw the radiant look on Grenville's frank face.

Dare took her into supper, and under the influence of the good news which she had just imparted made himself particularly agreeable.

He looked so thoroughly happy that Madge, who was watching him secretly whenever she had the chance, thought that her own happiness had been stolen from her by the wiles of her cousin, and hated her for it, with a sudden growth of hatred all the more vehement for its secret birth.

Vera had no idea that anyone could be jealous of her, and chatted away with an abandon that surprised herself.

This evening it had come upon her as a revelation that she was not deplorably plain, and her spirits rose to unusual height.

She was surprised to find that whenever their eyes met Sir Piers looked away in a hurry without any answering glance, but she could not imagine any reason for him to be angry, so she tried to think it was accidental, not intentional.

Mr. Pearson sat on her other side, and rather neglected his own partner to join in her conversation with Dare—a fact that was not lost upon Mrs. Vernon—who resigned herself to winning the prize for her niece, as he showed no sign of dropping down into the hands of either of her daughters.

"And now I am going to try my luck."

So saying Dare deposited Vera on a sofa in a corner of the drawing-room, and walking straight across the room to the spot where Madge was standing asked her boldly for the next dance.

The colour came and went in her cheeks as she bent her fluffy head over her fan.

"Rather late, isn't it, to make a new beginning!"

"Any time before the end will do," his courage rising as he thought he saw signs of capitulation.

"Unfortunately I am engaged to the end—and over it."

"This is an extra, so that plan will not stand."

"I have forgotten your step."

"Then it is time to teach you again. Come, the dance is certain to be too short—don't let us waste it."

"You have had the whole evening to think of it."

"The whole evening!" sinking his voice, "to wait, and watch, and go mad!"

"You might have asked me long ago," raising her eyes to his earnest face for a moment, and letting her lashes drop on her burning cheeks.

"Not with that barber's block by your side. Come, Madge, don't refuse it, or upon my honour I will start for the other side of the world in a fortnight."

She hesitated. The inveterate spirit of coquetry made it so terribly hard to yield.

He stepped back with such a look on his face as she never forgot.

"Sorry I asked you," he said, hoarsely. "I have the honour to wish you good-bye."

Before she could stop him he was gone, and a loud burst of music drowned her faint, —

"I will—I will!"

With a white face she came up to Mrs. Vernon shortly afterwards.

"Take me home, mother; I never was so tired before."

CHAPTER VI.

NEW YEAR'S DAY!

Vera Stapylton was at Wetherstone House once more, suffering from a fit of depression as she watched the snow-flakes falling in dreary iteration on the lawn.

The change from the pleasant life at the Hall was not unbenign in itself, and since her return Madge had been unusually unkind to her, and Mrs. Vernon inclined to be snappish.

She missed Mrs. Hawkshaw's motherly interest, Kate's cheerful chatter, and, above all, the frequent visits from Sir Piers Wentworth.

He had seemed somewhat changed on Christmas Day—grave and preoccupied; but he had wished her a merry Christmas with his own peculiarly

bright smile, and it seemed to cast a gleam of sunshine across her memory.

"Have those bookworms come from the Priory?" and Madge put her head into the schoolroom. "No! I particularly wanted to read them this evening. How tiresome people are!"

"I'll go and fetch them if you like," said Vera, throwing down her work.

"Oh, dear no; I couldn't think of troubling you," with a scornful curl of her lip. "What would dear Mrs. Hawkshaw say?"

"I don't know, and there is no time to ask," rising from her seat with an angry flush.

"Fancy the belle of the neighbourhood out in the snow! A crowd of men would be waiting in the road if they only knew!"

"You are always laughing at me, and it isn't fair," as she passed her cousin in the doorway.

"What does it matter if you have the Baronet, Dare Grenville, and a score of others to back you up?"

"Don't laugh at Dare, poor fellow," stopping still with her foot on the first step of the stairs; "when he only came to me to learn the best way of going back to you."

Before Madge could answer her she had run upstairs out of reach, but the shaft which she had let fly rankled long in her cousin's heart.

The snow had almost ceased when Vera set out for her walk, and she tripped along with a light, active step, exhilarated by the consciousness that she was doing a good deed under adverse circumstances.

The sky was a dull, dead grey, but the east wind brought a brilliant colour to her cheeks, which made her rival the brightness of a red-breast, who hopped upon a whitened twig, eager to chirp his carol of joy.

The way was long, so she was obliged to hurry, and she arrived at the Priory almost panting for want of breath.

Mr. Webster gave her the books at once, and said he would not even keep her to have a cup of tea, as he was sure a snowstorm was imminent.

Wishing the kind old man "A Happy New Year" she started homewards in the teeth of the biting wind.

Fortunately she could not make a mistake in the road, as it lay between two hedges; but the snow began to fall as soon as she had left the Priory, and it required some resolution to go on further and further away from the glowing fire she had left behind.

The wind was so high that it was as much as she could do to battle against it, and she was obliged to walk along with her eyes half closed to prevent the hard pellets from nearly blinding her.

She shivered in spite of the long fur-lined coat which Mrs. Hawkshaw had given her as a Christmas present, and the tips of her fingers, though clasped together in the recesses of her muff, were very chilly.

No robin redbreast came to cheer her on her homeward way, and the road seemed twice as long as it had before.

Mark Tapley himself could scarcely have been cheerful under the circumstances; and Vera, all alone in the gathering darkness, felt her spirits go down to zero.

Nevertheless she raised her small head bravely in the face of the storm, and struggled on with every bit of courage she could muster.

The snow deadened every noise, so that she did not hear the muffled sound of a horse's hoofs till the horse and his rider were close upon her.

Then she started back in fright, as the man pulled up and sprang to the ground.

"My poor child," said the welcome voice of Sir Piers Wentworth, "the idea of your being out in a storm like this. Was there nobody else to run their errands for them but you?" with a resentful flash in his blue eyes.

"It was not their fault. I offered to go."

"They were mad to let you. It seems odd that nobody will take even proper care of you for a week. Let me feel your hands. Why, they are frozen!" clasping them in his, and peering into her tired face.

"Child, what will become of you when I am gone?"

"Are you going away?" with sudden animation.

"Yes, I have some property to look after in Peru. I rode over to say good-bye to you this afternoon, and, not finding you at Wetherstone Priory, came out to look for you. How am I to get you home? Could you manage to sit my horse, or shall I give you my arm?"

"I will walk, please."

"Then lean upon me as heavily as you can."

He turned his horse round, and holding the bridle over one arm he held out the other to Vera.

She was tired out, and the snow clogged her boots, so that she could scarcely drag one foot after the other; but she thought neither of weariness nor cold, only of the news he had just told her, that he was going away.

Involuntarily she clung to his arm with a tightened clasp.

He had been such a sure shelter to her, not only from snow and rain and actual danger, but from the indifference of the world, and the consequent dejection that had nearly swamped her young life.

They did not talk much as they struggled on through the storm, but thoughts fly most rapidly when the tongue is tired; and Vera at least was surprised when she found herself standing in front of the door of Wetherstone House.

"Tired out!" said Sir Piers, as she did not speak. Then he tied the bridle of his horse to a railing and came towards her with a smile.

She took no notice of the question.

"When do you go?"

"To-morrow morning."

"And you come back—when?" her large eyes fixed upon his face.

"I can scarcely tell; perhaps in a year." She drew her hand hastily from his, and turned away her face.

"Why—why must you go?" trying to say the words so steadily that he should not guess how much she cared.

"Why should I stay?" carelessly flicking the snow off his boots with his riding whip. "Wildgrave will get on very well without me. The Hawkshaws may miss me, but you told me not long ago that you wished you had never seen me." A pause, during which a sound very like a stifled sob mixed with the gentle rustle of the snowflakes. "Why, child, you are crying!" In an instant his arms were round her, and he raised her tear-stained face much against her will to the light.

"I often cry," with a sob, "when I'm so tired."

"And sometimes when you say good-bye!" with a smile. "One moment, little one. What message to Max?"

"That, that," struggling to get free, "old friends are scarce!"

"And this for me!" Stooping quickly, he touched her cheek gently with his lips. "Good-bye, my little reluctant friend. I wonder if you will recollect me when we meet again!"

He opened his arms, and she flew to the door like a frightened bird to its nest, her heart beating wildly, her legs trembling.

"Remember your promise!" he called out as he unlocked the bridle and got on his horse.

There was no answer, for Vera was leaning against the wall panting and breathless, with a frightened look in her eyes, not understanding this new pain in her heart—not knowing that in the last minute she had grown from a child into a woman.

Sir Piers Wentworth rode away into the darkness, with a light in his eyes and a smile on his lips, knowing that he had planted a seed in the garden of love, and wondering if it would be given him to taste its fruits.

"Vera! where are you? We thought you were lost," and Madge came out of the drawing-room with a letter in her hand. "Did Sir Piers find you?"

The girl woke up from her dream.

"Oh, here are the books, I quite forgot them," thrusting them into her cousin's hands.

Madge lifted up her face and kissed her.

"I am sorry I was cross, dear, but," her lips quivering, "come into the schoolroom, there is no one there."

When they were safely ensconced in complete privacy by the fire Madge pulled off Vera's wet boots with unusual kindness, unbuttoned her coat, put a pair of old slippers on her feet, and then sat down on the floor by her side.

Leaning her head on Vera's knees she suddenly burst into tears.

"What is the matter?"

"He's going away with Sir Piers—and I shall never, never see him again. He's written such a letter—he says he loves me more than ever—and I've spoilt his life! Oh! Vera, what shall I do?"

"Wait till he comes back."

"But then he will have forgotten me," the tears streaming down her cheeks.

"Not if he loves you now!"

CHAPTER VII.

WINTER passed away, and spring hurried to deck every sunny bank with a wealth of primroses and violets.

Summer followed quickly on her heels with a capful of roses, and tennis-parties tempted the inhabitants of Wetherstone out into the sunshine.

The Vernons were good players, and asked out in every direction. Vera went with them sometimes, but very rarely, her aunt liking her best to stay at home, and not get in the way of her daughters.

However, when a large party was given at the Hall Mrs. Vernon knew that her niece must appear, and took care to see that she was nicely dressed in a white cashmere, and a large white hat with an ostrich feather that Colonel Stapylton had sent her from Aden.

There was a tournament, in which she played with Mr. Francis Pearson for her partner, and she was fortunate enough to win the ladies' prize—a beautiful fan of white feathers. Mr. Pearson took it from her hand and said,—

"You ought to have your name on the handle, as I saw it done the other day in small diamonds. Vera would look very well."

"So would any name!" as they walked away from the crowd down a walk bordered by roses; "but I think I should prefer my initials, V. G. S."

"That wouldn't do at all—a lady is apt to change them."

"I never shall!" stopping to admire a rose-bud.

"I hope you will," in a low voice.

"Why? Marriage is not always perfect bliss," thinking of Max and his unfortunate venture.

"It is the best imitation of it."

"Imitation is nothing—bad as false jewellery."

"Some people find the real thing."

"Very few—" from the depths of her large experience.

"How can you tell?" with a sudden smile. "I know more of the world than you do."

"Perhaps. It is a subject that does not interest me," moving on.

"Miss Stapylton, will you let me take this fan and get the initials put on for you?"

"I thank you, Mr. Pearson, you are very kind," with a slight bend of her head; "but I couldn't trouble you. Besides, I thought you objected to them?"

"Not to the ones I am thinking of." He was a cool man, but his courage rather failed him. "V. G. P." he added nervously, as he tried to take her hand.

She stepped back, her eyes opened wide in immense surprise.

"You have forgotten my name!"

"Not at all! But I wish you to change it, Miss Stapylton. Vera, is there no hope?" looking at her with as much tenderness as his dispassionate face could express.

"None!" very quietly, though her heart was beating uncomfortably fast.

"Are you sure? I know I could make you happy, and Ashton Grange would be a comfortable home."

"I don't care about being so very comfortable. And please don't say anything more about it," very hurriedly.

"Will you let me ask you again?" standing straight in front of the slim, graceful figure.

"Not for the world!" turning round and retreating with precipitate haste right into the arms of her aunt, who had been watching the *little-d-dle* with great interest, whilst making herself agreeable to the rector.

"My dear Vera, I wish you would look where you are going. Ah! Mr. Pearson, what a charming walk this is!"

"Yes," he said, absently; "but not now!"

And he slowly followed the object of his love, who seemed particularly anxious to get rid of him.

During the rest of the afternoon he never came near her, but he made her exceedingly uncomfortable by watching her from a distance, and once she saw him in earnest conversation with her aunt.

Mrs. Hawkshaw kissed her affectionately when she bade her good-bye, and told her, in a whisper, that she had excellent accounts from the wanderers.

Vera murmured, "I'm so glad!" and looked for a moment as if she wished to rival a peony which was raising its gorgeous head at a little distance.

Disgusted with herself for that tell-tale blush she jumped into the carriage, and, as she took her seat, met Mr. Pearson's eye.

He gave her a grave bow.

"Vera!" said Madge, excitedly, "mamma tells me that that stupid old 'gold nugget' has made you an offer. Are you going to be mistress of Ashton Grange? because, if so, you must alter the carpets—they positively make me ill!"

"The carpets will be as they are now!" looking rigidly before her.

"You haven't said 'No'!" breathlessly.

"Did you think I could say anything else?" in agitated scorn.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself if you have!" broke in Mrs. Vernon, hotly. "A lovely girl like you without a home of your own, and a father that always forgets you—you deserve to be whipped, and I only wish I could do it!"

Vera said nothing, but she turned as pale as death, and clasped the prize fan so tight that she broke one of its delicate ivory sticks.

This was the beginning of an endless persecution. Mrs. Vernon was a woman who could harp for ever with untiring patience on the same string, in a way that positively maddened her hearers. To think that the fortune of Francis Pearson, the well-known millionaire, had been offered to a girl under her own roof, and that the girl had been senseless enough to refuse it, nearly took away her breath and her power of sleep.

She worried Vera from morning to night, and if by any chance she forebore to worry she preserved a chilling silence, which was exceedingly depressing.

Vera bore it all with dogged resolution. Nothing on earth could have induced her to give in. Even if there had not been a shadowy hope to wait for, as a mariner will wait for the welcome light which is to beckon him ashore, she would not have chosen him for a husband.

He was a cold-hearted man, who could have no sympathy with a girl's generous impulses. He would have chilled her, like Mrs. Vernon's long silences, and she would have needed a host of friends, such as she had not got, to provide her with a mental seal-skin for her married life.

"What are you waiting for, you silly girl!" exclaimed Mrs. Vernon one dismal November day. "Do you think Sir Piers Wentworth is coming back from Peru for the purpose of making you an offer?"

The colour rushed into her cheeks at the unlooked-for taunt. "No, aunt, but I have given him my word that I will wait till he comes back with Max Rivington."

"Absurd nonsense, and most unmaidenly! It is just as bad as asking Mr. Rivington to make you his second wife."

Vera sprang to her feet. "Mr. Rivington was my father's friend, and surely I may wish to see him, without wanting to have him for a husband! You have no right to insult me!"

She hurried from the room, slamming the door after her in a way that relieved her feelings, but did not add to her dignity; and a few minutes afterwards was tearing through the fields at a rapid pace, in spite of the dreary fog; not caring where she went so long as she got beyond the reach of a woman's tongue.

Sheltered by the corner of a ruined shed she flung herself down on a bank, and gave way to a storm of tears. Her heart was torn by conflicting feelings, and she was quite unhappy enough without the added venom of her aunt's bitter speeches.

It was all very well to work all day long at her studies, in order that she might not disappoint her old friend and ally when he came back to find her, after these many years of separation; but hidden in the deepest recesses of her heart was a fear that all her hopes and longings were really for the newer friend, whom she had tried so hard not to like too well, out of loyalty to the absent Max.

She thought of him when she read her Schiller; she dreamt of him when she laid her head upon the pillow. The remembrance of Max grew shadowy as a forgotten picture, but the face of Sir Piers Wentworth was always with her, as if she carried his portrait on her breast.

She would have died rather than confess it to herself; but when she counted the days till Christmas she knew that it was for the sake of—not Max himself, but Max's friend.

It was quite dark when she got up and walked home. Lights were twinkling in the cottage windows, but they only seemed like dim sparks through the overhanging fog, as she hurried past them, gathering her furs closely round her slim figure.

She slipped in at the front door, hoping to escape to her own room without being noticed; but the drawing-room door was opened immediately, as if her arrival had been watched for, and her aunt's voice said,—

"Come in here, my dear; I have something to say to you!"

The tone was so much kinder than it had been of late that Vera was quite surprised. As she came into the room Mary walked out with averted face, and Madge followed with her handkerchief to her eyes, and her breast heaving convulsively.

"What is it?" and Vera leaned on the back of the sofa facing her aunt. She feared something, but the fear took no tangible form.

Her eyes rested idly on a piece of knitting which had fallen from Mrs. Vernon's lap, and she wondered why she did not pick it up.

There was a pause.

"My dear," said Mrs. Vernon, very gravely, "there is bad news from Peru."

Vera clutched the back of the sofa as if she would have broken it in two, but said nothing, waiting for more.

"As a party of English gentlemen were crossing the Andes into Brazil they were set upon by a troop of wild Indians, and cruelly murdered. The telegram is very short, but Mr. Grenville is mentioned and Sir Piers."

"Killed!" she said hoarsely, her eyes fixed in a strong stare on her aunt's face.

"Yes, murdered! Sit down, my dear. You don't feel well;" and she got up from her seat and came towards her.

But Vera put out her hand as if to keep her off, walked steadily to the door, and shut it behind her. When she was outside in the hall the floor seemed to reel upwards to the ceiling, and she fell flat on her face on the cold cloth.

CHAPTER VIII.

GRIEF and desolation seemed to have settled down on the inmates of Wetherstone House. Madge, the pretty little empty-headed coquette, went about the house like a ghost, with never a smile on her lips, or a look of joy in her once-sparkling eyes. Her character seemed to have completely changed. She was so soft and gentle in her ways that Mary often longed to hear her utter a cross word.

Vera was stricken down as if by a sudden blight. Brain fever followed on the shock, and for a long time she hovered between life and death.

There were all sorts of surmises afloat in the neighbourhood; but the most popular one was that she had been head over ears in love with the deceased baronet, who had not reciprocated her passion. Mrs. Hawkshaw was the only person who seemed to do her any good. She told her that the telegram was not to be trusted, and she expected soon to have letters from Rio, which might bring better tidings.

The words of hope brought the faintest tinge of colour to the invalid's lips. Even a plank is better than nothing to cling to in case of a general shipwreck, and she felt that she must have one ray of hope or die.

There was little doubt now as to which of the two, Sir Piers Wentworth or Max Rivington, had been deemed like the sun of her life, for when the one was eclipsed her existence had to make its onward struggle in darkness.

About the middle of December Mrs. Hawkshaw drove up to the Vernons in her pony-carriage, and entered the school-room, where Vera was sitting, with such a smile on her lips as made the girls grow faint with anticipation.

"Good news, my dear!" as Vera sprang into her arms. "Don't tremble so, or I shall scarcely have the courage to tell you. I have heard from him—so all our tears have been wasted. You needn't cry any more," pulling her down by her side on the sofa. "Silly child, if you don't stop I won't say another word. He seems to know nothing about the telegram, so has not an idea that we've been so dreadfully anxious. They had a fight with the Indians, who came upon them suddenly when they were resting in what they call an estancia, but they beat them off. Two of the party were killed; our poor friend Dare Grenville was stabbed in his chest with a bowie-knife, and Sir Piers himself had one or two scratches."

"And Dare!" falteringly.

"Is alive and doing well. I made them both promise before they went that they were to come to me directly they arrived in England, so if Miss Madge wishes to see her old love, and make it up with him, she will have to do it at the Hall. Vera, child, you don't seem half glad!"

"Don't I!" and she hid her face on her friend's lap, for some joy is far too great for words.

"I don't know about Sir Piers, but he tells me that he means to keep his promise to you, and Max Rivington shall meet you at the Hall on Christmas Eve."

"Won't he be there too?" in a muffled voice.

"He did not say so; he seemed to think you would care for no one else; but he might have thought of us."

"I must go and tell Madge," starting up. "Oh, Mrs. Hawkshaw, do you know it nearly killed her!"

"Poor girl! perhaps it will teach her to be more careful for the future. Bring her with you on Christmas Eve, and don't be later than half-past four. Good-bye. I must be going. You don't look quite such a washed-out ghost as when I came in."

When the news was told the two cousins sat side by side and hand in hand.

Their mutual sorrow had drawn them nearer together, and they felt that this unutterable joy must be shared with each other.

Oh! to see Dare once more brought from the land of shadows—to feel that he might know at least how much she loved him, and that the past was gone like a dream.

Madge's heart seemed as if it would burst for very thankfulness.

Christmas Eve came at last with a hard frost and a mantle of snow, and Vera jumped out of bed to find every tree and shrub in the garden sparkling with diamonds and rubies in the light of the early sun.

At half-past four the Vernons' carriage stopped before the gothic portico of the Hall, and the two girls stepped out with eager expectant faces.

Kate Hawkshaw met them in the hall, and after kissing Vera and shaking hands with Madge turned to the latter saying,—

"Will you come upstairs with me, as some one is very anxious to see you! Vera, I think you may find mamma in the library."

Madge followed with a wildly beating heart. They went up the broad staircase, turned into a picture gallery, then down a long corridor, at the end of which Miss Hawkshaw opened a door softly, and stood back for Madge to enter alone.

A man was lying on the sofa with a wan, white face, and eyes that looked enormous from the emaciation of his cheeks.

At sight of her lover, who had left her strong and healthy in the prime of his manhood, and now looked like a worn-out, middle-aged man, Madge ran forward with a breathless cry,—

"Dare, can this be you!"

"Yes, dear! They thought they had done for me, but they did not know that I couldn't possibly die till I had seen you!"

"And not then," she murmured, dropping down upon her knees by his side, her tears falling on his outstretched hands.

"Not if you love me really!"

One fond, eager look into each other's eyes, and then the fair head sank on the wounded breast, and Dare Grenville thought his pain well bought at such a price as this!

Meanwhile Vera had tapped at the library door, and receiving no answer, entered an empty room. Surprised not to find Mrs. Hawkshaw she walked up to the fireplace and stood with clasped hands and drooping head, looking down with absent eyes at the blazing logs.

She could not feel the elation she ought to feel at meeting, after so many years, her childhood's long-lost friend, and she was angry with herself, because regret for one who was still absent seemed to take from her the power of rejoicing as she ought to rejoice at welcoming the one who had returned.

The door opened, and a man walked out of the gathering shadows into the full light of the fire. He was tall and broad-shouldered, with a pale refined face, and a long drooping moustache; but there was a look in his unmistakable blue eyes which made the girl's heart nearly leap from her breast, though she stood quite still in breathless amazement.

"Have you forgotten your old friend, Max?"

It was the voice of the man who had saved her from drowning; who had met her in the snow, the rain, whenever she wanted help; and yet the face was like that other who had befriended her in her lonely childhood.

"Who are you?" she faltered. "Max—or Sir Piers?"

"Maxwell Piers Rivington Wentworth!" he said, with a joyous smile. "Obliged to drop my first name out of deference to the wishes of an old man who liked the second best because it was his own. How jealously have I kept every card of mine from your sight till you should guess the truth! Mrs. Hawkshaw was in the secret and played into my hands; and I would not have told you now if you had not dropped a tear when we said good-bye in the snow. My own little darling! do you recognise me at last?" and opening his arms, he drew her trembling figure close to his honest heart.

"Now you've cut off your beard," shyly, as her lashes dropped on her crimson cheeks.

"And when you are Lady Wentworth you won't feel that you have married an impostor!"

"Lady Wentworth!" starting back in a fright.

"Yes, you always told me that you would marry nobody else but Max," with a mischievous twinkle in his eyes, "and Max has made up his

mind to marry nobody but you! So what is to be done?"

"I needn't marry at all!" trying to slip away on to the sofa.

"Listen!" he said, gravely. "I determined to make you love me for my own self, and not for the sake of an ideal of your own imagination. Mrs. Hawkshaw tells me that when you thought that Piers Wentworth was dead you nearly followed him to the grave. Was it he or Max Rivington whom you wished to meet in this room? Tell me the truth, and don't play with me."

He looked into her eyes as if he would read her very soul, and then, as the lashes fell shyly on a burning blush, he stooped his head quickly and imprinted a passionate kiss on her fresh young lips.

"Child, it was worth coming home for this," he said, fervently, as he drew her down on to the sofa close to his side. And she was too happy to speak.

The wedding was celebrated early in the new year, and there were great rejoicings at Wildegrave Chase.

The bride looked charming in duchesse satin and Brussels lace, and Mary, Madge, and the two Miss Hawkshaws, who officiated as bridesmaids, had bouquets of yellow roses pinned on their left shoulders with pearl clasps in the shape of a closed umbrella—the gift of the bridegroom.

Sir Piers declared at a subsequent dinner to his tenants, when champagne flowed like a river, and cheers broke out at every pause, that all the greatest happiness of his life he owed to a lost umbrella.

The substitute was kept for long years in Lady Wentworth's room, and she never looked at it without a smile at the thought of her first meeting with the stranger.

[THE END.]

AS IT FELL UPON A DAY.

—10:—

CHAPTER V.

ELEANOR FOSTER had become an inmate of Lady Castletown's household very shortly after the sudden accident had occurred to make James Castletown's young wife a widow.

She had been brought to Rachel's notice before this time. Sebastian Lithgow had taken an interest in the girl, and had approached Rachel on the subject of finding her some possible employment as a secretary or amanuensis, or companion when he was asked to help her.

"Foster spoke to me about his daughter quite openly some time ago. I was able to help her to get an appointment as a governess, but she is tired of teaching, I believe, and wishes to become a companion." Mr. Lithgow had explained to his cousin (there was, of course, no real relationship between Marian Langridge's son and Rachel; but they had tacitly adopted the cousinship, and Rachel, at least, used the term frequently), when the matter was being discussed, "it seems the girl is not happy at home, she and her step-mother quarrel incessantly. I always thought it a foolish thing for Foster to marry a second time, especially as his wife is so much younger than himself. I believe this girl, Eleanor, is very clever and pleasant, and I should like to help her if possible. It is not always an easy matter for a man."

"I will help her. I am not a man," Rachel had cried with her usual impetuosity. "Why, as it so happens I am in want of a secretary myself, and I am sure"—this had been said with that unconscious confession of the daily misery of her married life, which was so hurtful to Bastian—"and I am sure I shall be glad enough to have a nice companion. Send Miss Foster to me, Bastian. She can at any rate come to me for awhile and see how we get on. I should like to help the girl, for I know you are devoted to your old Mr. Foster!"

Bastian had attempted a little argument with Lady Castletown.

"But you don't want a secretary; and as for a companion, how do you think Sir James will approve of the idea?" he had said.

"I don't intend to ask him," Rachel had answered very shortly; and then she had been angry with her cousin, "please don't dictate to me, Bastian; but tell me where I am to find this Miss Foster, and leave the rest to me."

It had been, however, as we have just said, some little time later than this before Eleanor Foster took up her residence with young Lady Castletown. Whatever objections might have been forthcoming had Rachel carried her project into action during her husband's life-time no one had anything to urge against her wish after his death.

Even her mother-in-law, Sophia Lady Castletown, had no word to say against the introduction of Miss Foster as a companion into the young widow's intimate life, save, perhaps, a sneer at Bastian's expense.

"Of course, if Mr. Lithgow recommends this young person there need be no doubt as to her respectability," the dowager had said grudgingly, and Rachel had replied characteristically.

"No," Bastian had been most careful. He has procured her parent's marriage certificate and her baptismal certificate also; and he is now only waiting to tell me the exact date when she was vaccinated, and then—"

But this remark had been brought to a close by Rachel's sister-in-law Gladys Castletown leading her mother away.

"Your diffidence is disgraceful," Miss Castletown had said, severely, as she went.

Rachel had laughed softly as she was alone, but there was always a touch of something grim in her laughter in those days.

Had it not been for the quiet, gentle, and inspiring influence that came to her from frequent contact with Sebastian Lithgow it is possible that Rachel's really beautiful nature might have been completely and most disastrously ruined by the circumstances attending on her mistaken marriage and early widowhood.

It seemed to be the girl's fate to be thrown constantly among people who either would not or could not understand her, and whose contrary attitude towards her roused the wildness that under-run her gaiety to the height of recklessness.

With her husband's family Rachel preserved a sort of armed peace, although in truth the girl frequently confessed to herself that grim and harsh and unsympathetic as the Dowager Lady Castletown and her daughters were, she was far better inclined to like them than she could ever have grown to like her husband.

It was in fact a standing marvel still to Rachel as to many other people that such a man as James Castletown had been could have come from such a family.

The little undernourished creature with his stable air and vicious conversation, his whole person breathing an atmosphere of vulgarity and dissipation, seemed to Rachel that he ought to have been the one being in the world whom her mother-in-law must have despised and turned from in horror. On the contrary, as it happened, Sir James was loved by his mother and sisters with no common love.

His outrages on the social points were called evidences of a strong character. His manners were considered merely funny. He had been spoilt from his birth, and he could do no wrong except perhaps in his having chosen so fair and young and innocent a girl for his wife.

The marriage with Rachel had never been warmly received by the Castletown family. Bastian Lithgow had his own theory about this. He felt, and had always felt, that if ever a number of good women were determined to make the best of a terrible trouble those women were James Castletown's widowed mother and sisters. The calmness with which they accepted all the offensive little creature's escapades was but an assumed calmness in Bastian's estimation.

He felt it was altogether incredible that women who were renowned for the austerity of their lives could in honest truth declare a sincere

admiration for one who while their nearest of kin was so utterly beneath and away from them.

And having this theory it was easy to Bastian to determine the root of their objection to Rachel as a wife for James Castletown. True the girl had no money, but there was already an over abundance of money in the Castletown coffers.

Rachel was a beautiful girl, very well connected, young, charming, and therefore far from being an undesirable or an unworthy wife for any son. Nevertheless, Sophia Lady Castletown had been almost openly averse to the marriage, and, as we have said, Bastian felt he knew why.

He felt sure that the mother in her heart dreaded the possibility of a scandal arising from such a marriage, and this without having been then brought into direct contact with Rachel herself and her strong straightforward character. She knew that her son was no fit mate for any pure young girl, and so it was she worked to prevent the marriage with Rachel. Unfortunately to such a nature as James Castletown's opposition was the one thing needed to make him determine to carry out any project even if he did not particularly care about this project himself, and his mother's interference in this matter only made him more anxious to make Rachel his wife without delay.

Bastian's theory would have been sorrowfully proved to him could he have known of a certain terrible scene when Rachel, then only a wife of a few days, had actually fled to her mother-in-law's home for protection and comfort, and the bitterness and horror which had always surged in his heart for the entire Castletown family would have grown deeper could he have been told of the coldness with which the girl's plea was met, and the haste with which she was conveyed back to her husband's roof and left to her fate alone.

Rachel naturally had never spoken to him of such a time. She had never in open words alluded to the miseries that had attended on her brief intimate life with the man that was dead save on one occasion, and that had been on a day when the question of Eleanor Foster had again cropped up between them.

Rachel had been still anxious to help the girl, but her tactics were changed.

"I will see if I cannot get Lady Sinclair to take Miss Foster for a little while. Flora is always so kind, and her house," Rachel had said with a tightening of her lips and a deep colour on her brow and cheeks, "her house is perhaps a more desirable home for a girl than mine can be."

Bastian had grown very white at these words. He had not heeded them, and yet they were the first confirmation from her loved lips of the kind of life she was called upon to live.

He found it hard not to rejoice in those days at the evidence of James Castletown's disdain for his honour as a married man.

The rumours of dissipation and scandal that reached Bastian's ears in the world, though they were horrible to him in one sense, yet had a consoling touch at the same time; for while there was so much to amuse and occupy the blackguard in the low strata of life to which he had always sunk, there was peace for Rachel, and a release from the companionship that was so awful to her.

Just as Rachel was interesting herself in finding some other opening for Eleanor Foster came the accident that ended her marriage in death, and when the first bewildered excitement had worn away, she found herself turning eagerly to the thought of Bastian's *protégée*.

She could not remain alone, and she quietly but surely refused the offers of the Castletowns to come and be with her.

"When I wanted them," she said to herself fiercely, "they refused me all help—now I will refuse them."

Anne, too, she would not have.

"She would remind me too much of Silchester and Uncle Herbert," she had said to Bastian when he urged her to write and ask Anne to come.

"I don't want to be reminded of Uncle Herbert," she had gone on half passionately, and then she had checked herself. "Besides, Anne is a necessity at the Rectory. I would not take her away for anything. Think what your dear

mother would be without her! No, I will have Miss Foster. I liked her very much; she is a lady, she is young, and she is human; you know what I mean by that!"

"I think I do," Bastian had answered with a smile.

And so it had been settled, and Eleanor Foster came with all her modest belongings, and was settled quietly in Lady Castletown's big London home.

The girl had been much touched by Rachel's kindness, and indeed the post that was given to her was something far easier and better than she had expected to obtain.

Bastian was touched also by Rachel's quick readiness to help the girl, and as the days went by, and he saw how pleasantly the arrangement answered, he could not but feel glad that he had been the means of introducing Eleanor Foster into the household.

Rachel had soon grown attached to the girl; she was apt to regard herself as quite maternally where Eleanor was concerned, whereas, as a matter of fact, Miss Foster was three or four years her senior, and a girl who was in every sense old for her age.

Nevertheless they got on admirably together; there was a decided touch of sympathy between them, and Eleanor Foster was, apart from her qualities as a secretary and housekeeper, so full of accomplishments that Rachel was never tired of extolling her.

"She knows heaps more than I do! I can't play a note of music properly. I sing just at my own sweet will. You know what sort of a linguist I am; altogether I am shockingly ignorant compared with Nell. I am not surprised she got tired of teaching a lot of tiresome brats! I think she is clever enough to be anything; she is much too clever to be a mere lady's companion."

This was the sort of speech Rachel frequently made to her cousin, and his answer was invariably the same.

"Miss Foster is happy with you; she was only thanking me again the other day for having brought her to you. She is not grand at all, Rachel, she is only grateful."

"She is a very wonderful person, then," Rachel had cried out once.

But she was really fond of her companion.

"I believe I get on better with Nell than I should ever get on with any one in the world," she said to herself sometimes.

It was a confession that hurt her a little when she remembered Anne—for Rachel loved Anne most dearly.

There was a time when she would have been content to pour out the whole wealth of her girlish love on Anne, had she received the smallest encouragement; but Anne's nature was ultra undemonstrative, and Rachel's love was of the kind that must be given voice to, and receive open declaration in return.

On this night when she had gone upstairs to her own room after Bastian had taken his departure she called Miss Foster to her.

"Come and have a cosy chat, Nell," she said, and she had given a little comfortable shrug of herself as she put herself into her satin-quilted dressing-gown. "It is nice here," she added, and then, after a little pause she had made another remark.

"How little I ever thought I should ever come to find anything nice in this gloomy old house. Nell, this is your doing."

Eleanor Foster caught the hand outstretched, and pressed it for an instant in her own.

She, like Bastian, had no need of words to tell her what sort of existence it was Rachel had led before her widowhood set her free.

"You are too good to me, Lady Castletown," she said, faltering a little in her words. "What have I done for you!—what could I do for you in comparison to what you have done for me!"

"We are not making comparisons, we are making statements," Rachel answered, as she put herself into a chair in front of the fire, "and I state that I am glad to be back here again, and that the comfort I find in the place now the homy sensation that greets me has come entirely through you."

Eleanor Foster drew up another chair and sat down too, shielding her face from the fire with her hand. There were tears in her eyes, and they rolled down her cheeks; she was very pale.

Rachel saw the tears. She leaned forward and touched the girl gently.

"Silly Nell," she said, in her pretty, caressing voice, "now let us talk. Oh! the joy of being out of Silchester once again! I believe I love London better than any place in all the wide world; don't you, Nell?"

Eleanor Foster smiled faintly.

"I do love London very much," she said.

Rachel looked at her quietly.

"I wonder why you have been working so hard while I have been away, Nell."

Eleanor looked round.

"I did not work very much," she answered.

"Well, you are pale, and you look ill. If you have not been overworking, what is the matter, dear?"

Miss Foster's pale face was flushed crimson for an instant.

"I spent Sunday at home with my father; it always upsets me when I go home."

There was a sort of hesitation in the girl's voice, almost as though she were not telling the actual truth.

Rachel, however, did not notice the hesitation.

"Poor Nell!" she said with true sympathy. "I quite understand. I don't think I shall let you go home any more; it never does you any good. Why not let your father come to see you here! He can come every day and all day, if he likes; you know that."

Eleanor's lips quivered.

"Yes; I know your goodness in all things," she answered; "but—" she seemed to hesitate again, "I think father likes me to go home. It has always been a great disappointment to him that I would not make up my mind to live with Mrs. Foster, and I know he would suffer if I renounced going to see him altogether. It is my duty," she finished, in a dry hard tone.

"Well, you shall do just as you like," Rachel said, cheerily, seeing that the girl was really troubled; "all I ask of you is to be happy, dear. I want you to be happy, Nell, and I want to be happy myself! We have both of us had what we might call a rough beginning, but surely we may hope for a smoother time in the future, with more sunshine." And then Rachel changed her voice and her mood. "Come and brush my hair, like an angel. I told Sylvia you would do it to-night. Your hand is much softer than hers."

Eleanor Foster hurried to obey this wish. She unpinned the bright, brown, silky hair, with its threads of wondrous gold and its shadings of almost copper red, with hands that evidently loved their task; and while she passed the brush softly through the beautiful mass of curls Rachel sat chattering on as easily as a schoolgirl released from school.

"It is a shame to make you wait upon me, Nell," she said after a while, as she turned and took the brush from Eleanor's hand. "Yes, I know what you are going to say; you are glad to do anything for me, but, all the same, there are limits. Now, you must go to bed; I am not at all pleased with your looks. Go to bed and sleep well, dear. To-morrow we shall have lots of time to talk. Kiss me, Nell. Good-night!"

Rachel stood looking into the fire a long while when she was alone. She had kept Eleanor with her because she had wished to shirk as long as possible what she knew was inevitable, a time of close thought, of bitter-sweet thought; of thought that was troubled, and yet that was not grieved with contempt.

The arrival of the flowers so immediately after her return was as open a declaration of Giles Hamilton's intentions as plain words could have been, and Rachel, whilst she was unable to deny her disdain for the motives that had prompted this man to come once again into her life, had yet so much of her old girlish self in her still, cherished so dearly the broken blossom of that love that had been so strong and so sweet, that it was impossible for her to realise that there was such a declaration without her heart being stirred to its uttermost depths, and without experiencing both fear and regret that

her new-born peace should be perhaps invaded—and maybe imperilled—by the influence of this man whose image had never been utterly driven out of her heart.

If she had not seen him face to face the day before there would have been more contempt and less disturbance in Rachel's mind now. She did not attempt to alive over anything. She did not try and put the man's action in a better light. She told herself in blunt words that it was to her wealth and to her social position she owed any attention Giles Hamilton might offer to her now, and yet though her pride rose like iron in her heart at the memory of all that he had made her suffer, the vision of his handsome face lingered before her eyes with all the old glamour, and she knew, however proud she might be, it was still possible to her to suffer and suffer deeply through her love for Giles Hamilton.

CHAPTER VI.

EARLY springtime as it was there was a fair amount of the fashionable world gathered in London about this time. Rachel was glad of this, she had developed an eager desire to be in a life of incessant movement. This season she intended to entertain a little herself.

"Of course I know I shall bring down the wrath of the Castletowns on my head—but what do I care for them!" she said to Eleanor Foster when she was sketching out her plans for the future. "They would like to take away all my money; but they can't! That's one blessing, at any rate, and I don't see why I should not enjoy myself in my own way. I am not in deep mourning now."

"What does Mr. Lithgow say?" Miss Foster answered to all this.

"Bastian! Oh! he will do just what I want!" Rachel said, carelessly; "besides, I am not going to do anything very tremendous. Just a few dinners and some small musical evenings. Surely, Nell, there can be no harm in these!"

There was such a wistful tone in the pretty voice that Eleanor Foster was moved to rise from the writing table and bend forward to kiss the speaker.

Rachel returned the kiss warmly.

"I don't know why," she said, half hurriedly, "but I feel awfully frisky just now. Is it the spring do you think, Nell? When I was riding in the Park this morning I had a sort of longing to let my mare bolt with me. The air was so exhilarating and the flowers are so bright—altogether," with another hurried laugh, "I think spring weather is most demoralising."

Eleanor Foster went on writing for several moments. Sir James Castletown's widow being known to have inherited a very fine fortune was besieged by begging letters from far and wide, and part of Miss Foster's morning work was to get these letters answered to the best of her abilities.

"Mr. Lithgow has not been to see you for nearly a week," she remarked after a little while.

"Not for a whole week," Rachel amended, "not since the night of the day I came back. I am quite furious with him. How dare he desert me like this! Nell, put away those letters; we will drive down to the office and see Bastian ourselves. I had a letter from his mother this morning; she gave me a message for him. What is it! Can't you come! I see you are hesitating."

"There is that appointment with the man about the library," Miss Foster said quickly. Rachel paused.

She wore a black serge mourning gown, and her slender waist was encircled by a silver belt. Her beautiful brown hair was ruffled, she looked most sweet and fresh and lovely as she stood by the window, with the clear, strong, spring sunshine pouring down upon her. The heart of the girl sitting by the table had a thrill of tender admiration for the picture of charm and beauty that Rachel made, but after the thrill there came a heavy thud—a sense of envy that was like a definite pain.

She herself was not without a certain charm in her neat well-fitting frock. Her hair was so carefully done, and her skin was fresh and fair, too, but there was a drawn tired look in Eleanor Foster's face, and deep shadows round her eyes that spoke of a trouble that could not be easily cured.

Rachel was not long in making up her mind.

"Well—I tell you what I shall do—I shall go to Bastian, and you will remain here and settle everything. It's rather a bore, Nell, you can't come too—but I know what an old fidget you are—and how you hate breaking an appointment. So you shall stay and I will go. Bastian will be so astonished to see me. I shall walk in upon him as if I had come on most important business, and Nell—I mean to enjoy myself immensely, I shall go by an omnibus outside. Oh! do try and think what Lady Castletown would look like if she could see me outside an omnibus."

Rachel danced away as she spoke, and Eleanor heard her laughing as she went up the stairs.

"She is happy. Oh! thank Heaven she is happy at last!" the girl said to herself as she was alone, "and it is so right she should be happy, she is so good, so unselfish, so sweet. To take from her one moment of brightness is a crime—and yet—and yet," Eleanor Foster cried passionately, "if I love her, this is my duty. Oh! why should this miserable suffering come to me now—now when I was growing more peaceful, when I had dared to hope that the worst of the pain was over. If I might only share my trouble with someone—if I might only open my heart to one creature, it seems so terrible to deceive her, and yet what can I do? My weakness led me into this pass. Had I been true to myself I should have gone into another world—gone where no one would have known who or what I was—where—his name would never have reached my ears again!"

She buried her face in her hands for a few moments, and then as she heard Rachel's voice speaking outside she hastily resumed her work.

"Now, am I dressed properly for an omnibus?" inquired Lady Castletown, popping in her head.

"Nell, I hope I shall have several adventures; don't look shocked. Don't sit there too long, and don't expect me home to luncheon. I shall make Bastian give me something to eat."

Rachel's solemn-looking butler opened the door for her, looking not a little scandalized at his mistress's unconventionality.

"I'm going to be out all the morning," Lady Castletown said, as she fitted down the steps looking little more than a school-girl in her serge costume and tailor hat with a black ribbon.

She hurried along through the sunshine.

"I want to see Bastian," she said to herself. "Why has he not come all this time. Have I vexed him. His note yesterday morning sounded grumpy I thought. Now where do I get my omnibus, I wonder!"

Pausing to choose her destination Rachel's fresh beauty was a magnet that drew many eyes to her, an admiration which was lost to her.

"I think I go this way," she said to herself, and then she broke off in her thoughts, and said, "Oh!" not without some confusion, as a young man who had leaped from a hansom at sight of her came and stood directly in her path. It was Giles Hamilton.

"Lady Castletown, at last Fate is kind to me," he said, eagerly. "I have called twice at your house and have never been fortunate enough to find you."

Rachel shook hands with him apparently with the greatest indifference.

"No. I am very seldom at home," she answered him, most coldly.

He bit his lip.

"Is your mourning still so deep that you are compelled to deny your friends the pleasure of seeing you?" he asked, with ill concealed chagrin.

Rachel laughed.

"Oh! I see my friends at all times," she said, quite gaily.

Giles Hamilton changed colour. Not since the afternoon he had turned and seen her standing in the small village post-office had her image faded from his mind, and now she was before him again he found her beauty even greater



THE MAN STOOD LOOKING AFTER HER GRACEFUL FIGURE ADMIRINGLY, PASSIONATELY, INCREDULOUSLY.

than it had been in that fleeting glimpse of it. And just as her charm and loveliness was enhanced by a second sight so he recognized that the task he had set himself was going to be twice as difficult as his vanity had led him to imagine.

He had been piqued by her absolute silence after the arrival of his flowers, and he had been waiting expecting some sort of recognition to be vouchsafed to him for his remembrance.

A charming note, an invitation to lunch. He had had many flirtations that had ended just as briefly as that little affair at Silchester when Rachel had been such a pretty, but such a poor little maiden, and none of these other flirtations had worked out in the way this was working.

"I suppose," he said, turning and strolling beside her as almost unconsciously Rachel's feet moved onwards, "I suppose I am to understand by that that you desire me to remain outside the barrier of your friendship?"

Rachel laughed again, but her heart was beating very quickly.

"I don't think I mean anything in particular, Captain Hamilton," she said, still coldly and distantly; "but you must please forgive me; I am a most unconventional person you know, and I always speak my mind."

"And so do I," he said, fiercely, in answer to, and back over the girl's disturbed mind there came floating the remembrance of when last he had spoken plain words to her. She turned very pale. It was all very well to play a rôle for a short time, but Rachel was too absolutely sincere, too real a nature to support a false position for long.

She brought matters to a crisis now.

"May I beg of you that you will kindly not push this matter further, Captain Hamilton," she said, hurriedly, and her voice, though still cold, trembled a little, as his astute ears were quick to hear. "No doubt our mutual surroundings will tend to bring us occasionally in contact with one another. That being so I think it is as well to leave our meetings to chance, not to enter

into any new bond of friendship. I am sorry to leave you so abruptly, but I have an appointment in the City and I am late as it is. Good-bye; please give my remembrances to your mother."

She had moved away from his side, and had crossed the road immediately after this speech, and the man stood looking after her graceful figure admiringly, passionately, incredulously.

"By Heaven!" he said to himself in that moment; "but I will not be content with this, Rachel! When a man has eaten bread do you think he will be content with a stone? You have given me your love once. I shall claim it again, and hold it, too, for all my life. You are cold and cautious, and I am sure you are calling yourself clever in thrusting me away as you do now; but my eyes are too keen, my dear; I have looked once into your nature. I know you love me still. I shall not rest till I have made you confess that love a second time."

Deep in his thought Hamilton turned up Eaton-square. He had nothing to occupy him.

Life was not too busy or too pleasant with him just now. The bitterness of what he called poverty was eating the edges from his usual luxurious circumstances.

It was not alone Rachel's beauty that had put such a thrill of pleasure into his heart. He had arrived at that crisis when money in some shape or form was absolutely vital to him.

He had drained his mother's resources to the dregs—he had squandered his own long ago.

Debts and difficulties stood in his path in every direction, and this morning as he sauntered along, tall, handsome, smart, a veritable example of a fashionable London man, he hardly knew which way to turn for five pounds.

The question of letting such a chance as Rachel slip from his grasp was therefore quite impossible, and his hope fed by his vanity, rose once again as he let his thoughts dwell upon her, and recalled the expression of her face as she had hurried away from him just now.

Opposition with him, as with most men, was the very stimulant to push him on to his determination.

"She has shown me that she remembers, it will be for me to show her that I know she remembers. Once I have broken down her pride I shall go on easily. Rachel Castletown shall be my wife!"

He was passing the big Castletown house as this thought framed itself in his mind. His eye glanced over it casually.

There was nothing to mark it out for special interest, and yet, as Giles Hamilton looked slowly from one window to another his face grew suddenly crimson, and then as suddenly ashen white. A girl's face had looked back at him from a window near to the street—eyes that he had hoped were closed in death had gazed into his in a very anguish of love, fear, and remembrance.

He stood rooted to the spot for one moment, and then he had walked on, his heart like stone in his breast—his brain a seething tumult out of which rose one question that could not be answered.

What was Eleanor Foster doing in Rachel Castletown's house?

(To be continued.)

THE necessity for salt among aboriginal races must have been paramount, for nature craves it. Salts of soda are to be found in all animal and vegetable substances man uses, but it does not seem to be so assimilable as sodic chloride. Primitive Americans were certainly fortunate, because sources of salt far away from the seaboard were fairly numerous. The work of procuring salt must have fallen in a large measure on women. There was a Mexican goddess who was honoured as the salt giver. Bancroft, in his Aztec studies, tells how an Aztec king kept the Tlascalas without salt for years, until they acknowledged his sovereignty.



THERE WAS A CRASH; THE LAMP WAS THROWN TO THE GROUND, AND THE ROOM WAS IN DARKNESS.

THE GREYSTOKE MYSTERY.

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CHAPTER V.

THE INQUEST.

The following day the inquest was held on poor Frank St. John's body, and, as was natural, it evoked an immense interest in the neighbourhood. Veronica Graham was one of the witnesses, and her stepmother accompanied her.

The entrance of the two ladies created quite a sensation. Both were dressed in black, and both wore veils, but Vera's queenly bearing invariably called attention to her, and Mrs. Graham noticed with a horrible pang of envy the many glances of involuntary admiration that were showered on the young girl.

She herself had taken unusual pains with her own appearance, and the result was certainly a success, so far as it went. She had covered her face with powder, and filled up the hollows in her cheeks with paint; her eyes were delicately shadowed with black markings, and her hair, supplemented by additional tresses, was curled and waved very elaborately. Looking at her reflection in the glass at home she had smiled in a well-pleased manner—it was only when she contrasted it with Vera's fresh young loveliness that she saw how hopeless it was for art to attempt to compete with nature!

Vera's glance flashed rapidly over the many faces around her, and then arrested itself on two gentlemen who were standing a little apart from the rest. The one was a man past middle age, tall, erect, soldierly, with iron grey hair and moustache—Lord Evremond, Frank's uncle. The other was Maurice—but how changed from the Maurice of two days ago! His face was dark and grave and stern; he looked years older than when Vera bade him good-bye on that fatal afternoon.

He bowed to her, but there was no time to attempt to speak, for the proceedings were on the point of beginning. The porter and station-

master of Greystoke were the first witnesses called, and they deposed to finding the body of the deceased lying on the floor of the railway carriage. Then came the doctor, who could only say that the deceased had died from the effects of a stab in the breast, which had penetrated to the heart, and must have proved instantly fatal. After that Veronica Graham was called, and a little murmur of admiration went round as she advanced, throwing up her veil, and disclosing to view her pale earnest face, with the beautiful eyes full of tears. Her story of the old lady who had drugged her was listened to with profound attention, but it did not tend to throw much light on the matter.

Then came Lord Evremond, who gave his evidence quietly and clearly, and without any special show of emotion. Frank St. John was his nephew, he said, the younger son of his dead brother, and he was on his way to Evremond Court when he met his death. His mission was to bring with him a case of valuable jewels, which had been left to Lord Evremond by a relative in India, and which had arrived in England from the East only the day before. This case of jewels had disappeared, thus showing that the motive of the crime was robbery. Asked if it was known that the jewels were on their way to him, witness said he believed not. He had done all in his power to keep the fact from becoming public. For his own part he had not mentioned it to anyone except his two nephews, and the captain of the vessel who had brought the case over from India. Had deemed it safe not to do so. The jewels were worth somewhere about ten thousand pounds, he believed—it might be more, but it was certainly not less.

When Lord Evremond stepped down his place was taken by his surviving nephew, Maurice St. John, who had to make a strong effort to control his emotion. He spoke in a very low voice, but it was little enough he had to say. He was visiting friends who lived near R—, and hearing from his brother that he would be passing

through the station on that special afternoon he had gone to the junction to see him.

The jewels had certainly been safe then, for he himself had lifted the case from one compartment to another when Frank changed carriages. Asked if his brother was in debt, he answered in the affirmative; he did not know to what amount, but he fancied it was considerable. Frank had intended asking his uncle to advance him a loan, and he had been hopeful of obtaining it. He had seemed in the very highest spirits when his brother bade him good-bye. This completed the witnesses' examination. The jury did not take long to consider their verdict. It was one of "Wilful murder against some person unknown."

"Thank Heaven it is over!" murmured Mrs. Graham, with a deep sigh of relief. "Now let us go."

The two ladies made their way outside; but they had not reached the ramshackle old pony-chaise that had conveyed them hither when Vera felt a slight touch on her shoulder and, turning round, saw Maurice St. John at her side.

"I beg your pardon," he said, hastily, "may I have a few minutes' conversation with you, Miss Graham?"

Madame looked up sharply, her face flushing under her paint, but she came to a standstill.

"Pardon me," Maurice added, cautiously, but without the least trace of embarrassment as he saw that she intended remaining as a listener, "I wish to say a few words in private to Miss Graham, if you will kindly permit it."

"There is nothing you can have to say to her which I also cannot hear," responded Madame, obstinately.

Maurice gave her one swift comprehensive look which told him that argument would be of no avail. He bit his lip in indecision, and while he hesitated Lord Evremond came up, raising his hat to Vera.

"Will you permit me to shake hands with you, Miss Graham? I used to know your father in my youth; but I have not seen him for a long, long time, although we are living within ten miles

of each other; and that in the country is not such a great distance."

"No," returned Vera slightly embarrassed, "but my father is an invalid."

"So I understand. Nevertheless, I should be very pleased if he would strain a point in my favour, and let me come over and see him. I have called once or twice, but have never been fortunate enough to find him in."

"I will tell him," the young girl rejoined, while Mrs. Graham stood by with lowering brow at finding herself thus left out in the cold. As a matter of fact Lord Evremont did not know who she was, although he set her down in his mental note-book as "bad style."

Raising his hat once more, and with a lingering glance of admiration at beautiful Vera, which she would willingly have dispensed with, he turned on his heel, while Mrs. Graham took her place in the pony-carriage.

At that moment a little brooch Vera wore at her collar dropped out, and she and Maurice simultaneously stooped to pick it up. He was swift to take advantage of the opportunity.

"Be outside the Grange, gates some time after seven this evening, if you can," he murmured quickly below his breath. There was not time for her to answer; but he saw from her look of comprehension that she had heard, and he felt sure that if she could she would keep the appointment.

"I hope we have seen the last of them!" exclaimed Mrs. Graham, violently, as she turned the pony's head homewards. "Why didn't you tell Lord Evremont that it was no good coming over to the Grange, because your father won't see him if he does?"

"I think it would do my father good to see him," Vera answered, steadily. "It certainly cannot be a good thing for papa to live the life of a hermit, as he seems to do."

"That is for him and me to judge, not for you!" snapped madame. "You take a great deal too much upon yourself; and I tell you straight I won't allow it. There is only one mistress of the Grange, and that is myself. I permit no intrusion on my domain. Do you hear?"

"I hear."

"And understand?"

"I think I understand too," Vera said, with a level glance out of her beautiful eyes that made the other woman lower her own.

Then she sighed. Already she had recognised the fact that her step-mother was a tyrant, and a jealous one to boot. Her own life at the Grange certainly did not promise to be a happy one, but she thought less of that than of her father, and of the stranger who had been talking to madame in the hall on the night of her arrival. Who was the latter? Why should he and Mrs. Graham consult together in the dead of night? Ignorant of the world as Vera was, she was no fool, and she could not find an innocent interpretation of the scene she had witnessed.

Her mistrust of the elder woman increased with every hour, and gradually there grew up in her mind an idea that her father was the victim of a conspiracy on his wife's part, and this was the reason why the latter was so anxious to keep her away from him.

She had not seen him at all that day, and when they got home madame told her shortly that he had a headache and could not be disturbed, so the young girl went at once to her own sitting-room—a pretty old-fashioned apartment, panelled in oak and furnished with spindle-legged tables and chairs to match, covered with faded silk brocade.

Here she remained the whole afternoon.

Just as it was beginning to grow dusk Mrs. Graham entered with a tray, which she set down on a side table.

"I have brought you your supper," she remarked, looking out at the green waters of the moat, across which a gleam of crimson light was thrown from the western sky. "I am going to sit with your father, so I shan't have supper laid this evening. You won't mind eating yours alone?"

"Certainly not"—promptly.

"How do you like your room?" queried

madame, glancing round. "The furniture is dreadfully old-fashioned, but it is the best I could scrape together out of the lumber-room, and we can't afford to get you anything new. Later on we may manage it, perhaps."

"I don't want anything new, I like these quaint old things immensely."

"That's right, I'm glad something in the house meets with your approval," madame observed, with a trace of sarcasm in her voice.

Vera coloured.

"I hope I haven't shown myself discontented," she said, a little stiffly.

"Oh, as to that I don't blame you, I should be discontented myself if I were in your place, I daresay. It is not right that a young girl like you should be cooped up in a hermitage—and that, as you said this morning, is what this place is. I may not seem to you sympathetic, but I remember my own childish days, and if I could make your lot brighter I would do so. You shall go up to London before very long, and enjoy yourself. I'll manage it somehow or other."

She smiled as she left the room, evidently pleased with the idea. Vera's face, however, did not reflect the smile. She was pretty shrewd in her judgment, and madame's sudden solicitude for her welfare did not deceive her in the very slightest degree. Her conviction that her step-mother wanted to get rid of her deepened.

The clock had struck seven while madame was in the room, and Vera dared not say anything to hasten her departure. She waited for a quarter of an hour longer, then put on her hat and mantle, and stole quietly down the bare oak staircase, her footsteps waking no echo. The house was very quiet, not a sound disturbed it, still Vera's heart beat rather apprehensively, for it was quite possible she might meet her step-mother, who would be as likely as not to forbid her leaving the house.

In the hall she was confronted with another difficulty. The great door was bolted and barred ready for the night, and she would inevitably betray herself if she attempted to undo the fastenings. She hesitated for a few seconds almost in despair, then her gaze fell on a side window, leaded, and filled with stained glass. It was only about five feet from the floor, and she could easily climb up to the sill and jump down on the other side. In a moment she had put this idea into execution, and gently closed the window again as firmly as was possible from the outside.

"If no one notices that it is unfastened I can get in the same way," she murmured to herself, observing the thick stems of the ivy below the casement, and calculating that they were quite strong enough to bear her weight. Besides, when she had once accomplished her object and seen Maurice she did not much mind if she was found out.

CHAPTER VI.

LIGHTLY and fleetly Veronica ran down the avenue, keeping well in the shadow of the trees. She had scarcely passed through the great iron gates of the tenacious lodge before Maurice joined her.

"I was almost afraid you were not coming," he said, his grave eyes lighting up as they fell upon her.

"I could not get away earlier. I am very sorry if I have kept you waiting."

"You need not be sorry for that. I would have waited willingly till morning if it had been necessary. My only fear was that you might find it difficult to leave home."

"It was a little difficult. No one knows I am out of the house."

Maurice's face clouded over so slightly.

"I am afraid I have done wrong in asking you to meet me secretly," he said. "I ought to have thought of possible unpleasant consequences, but I was so anxious to have a talk with you that I thought of nothing else. Will you forgive my selfishness?"

"I have nothing to forgive. I was to the full

as anxious to come, for I wanted to hear if you had obtained any clue to—the murderer."

She murmured the last word almost below her breath and with a little shiver, but she saw the change that instantly came over Maurice's face. His eyes darkened, his breath came quicker, his whole aspect seemed instinct with a desire for vengeance which dominated every other feeling, and under its influence he looked a totally different man.

"It was of that I intended speaking," he said, and even his voice had grown hoarse and strained. "I am going to dedicate myself to the task of avenging poor Frank's death, and you are the only creature who can help me. I am convinced that the woman who drugged you was the guilty person, and I must find her, and bring her to justice. A life for a life! It is Heaven's law, and it is a righteous law. I want you to describe her to me very minutely—down to the smallest detail. I could not ask you to do so this morning before all those people, for I saw how painful it was to you to give your evidence, but I thought you would not mind repeating it to me alone."

"On the contrary, I will do everything I possibly can to help you," she said, looking at him steadily out of her clear candid eyes. "I will not say I am as anxious as you to bring retribution on the murderer, but I fully sympathise in your desire. It was a cruel deed—cruel, cruel!"

For a moment Maurice did not trust himself to speak; then he said, in a low voice,—

"It was indeed cruel—poor Frank, who had never in all his young life willingly harmed a creature—who was kind and generous even to a fault! Well, it is no use recalling all that. I have steeled my heart to mercy—I will have vengeance!"

Then he began to question Vera, with a skill and closeness that many a barrister might have envied. No detail was too small for him, no trifle too trifling. He took out a little pocket-book and made notes in it of her answers, and she was astonished to see how copious those notes were.

"Now, I want you to describe her dress. You say it was made of black brocade. Can you remember the pattern on it?"

She considered a minute, while memory brought a vivid picture of the old lady before her.

"Yes," she returned, slowly, "there were true lover's knots scattered all over it, and between the knots were tiny stars woven in the fabric."

Maurice's eyes grew triumphant. He took from the pocket book a scrap of black brocade carefully pasted on white paper.

"Is there light enough for you to see it?" he asked.

She answered in the affirmative, as she examined the morsel of silk very attentively. Then she gave it back to him.

"That is a piece out of the dress," she said, quietly.

"You are sure of it?"

"Positive. I can see part of the knot, and the star quite distinctly. Where did that bit come from?"

"It was in the catch of the handle of the railway carriage where my brother's body was found. I discovered it myself, and took possession of it without saying a word to anyone. Of course there was the chance of its having been left there by a previous passenger, but your testimony clears away that doubt, and makes it quite certain that the woman on quitting your carriage got into the next one. That at any rate is one step gained."

"But I don't see that it helps you very much," Vera said, dubiously.

"On the contrary, it helps me immensely, for it gives me an absolute certainty to start from in my future investigations. Now, tell me, did you notice anything unusual in the woman's hands when she grasped your wrist, before making you inhale the chloroform?"

"She wore well fitting black kid gloves."

"Were the hands large?"

"Not too large for her size. She was a tall

woman, and rather stout—quite as tall as I am.

"And her voice—did it sound natural?"
 "No, now you mention it, I don't think it did, though the idea has not struck me before. It was a false voice."

"Such as might be adopted as a disguise?"
 "Yes."

"Do you think if you saw her again you would recognise her?"

Vera shook her head very doubtfully.
 "That I cannot say. I might or might not. She wore a thick veil that hid her features in a great measure, although it did not quite conceal the fact that they were handsome."

Maurice came a step nearer and lowered his voice still more, though it had hardly risen above a whisper during the whole of the conversation.

"I am going to startle you. My theory is that your travelling companion was a man in woman's dress."

She was assuredly startled, but only for a moment.

Then her mind rapidly reviewed all that had taken place in the railway carriage, and she said emphatically,—

"I believe you are right. Strange that the idea did not occur to me before!"

They walked for a little distance in silence along the grass-grown lane, which was dark with the shadows of the overhanging trees, although the sunset colours still lingered in the west.

It was a lovely spring evening, calm and still. A blackbird was singing in a bush close at hand, and in the pauses of his song another answered him from farther off.

On the banks rabbits were feeding, but they disappeared with a quick whisk of white tail at the approach of the two human creatures walking so quietly side by side.

"Are you going to employ detectives to help you unravel the mystery?" Vera asked presently.

"One, perhaps. In a case like this you cannot take too few people into your confidence—you cut the ground from under your feet by so doing. I have already formed a theory, and I shall proceed to work upon it."

"Would it be indiscreet of me to ask what it is?"

"No, I will tell you, on your giving me a promise to keep it a secret even from your father."

She gave the required promise readily enough, and Maurice continued,

"I believe, as I have already said, the supposed old woman was a man in female attire, who by some means or other had found out the object of poor Frank's journey. You will remember that at R. Junction she, or he, got in the train at the last moment, but before that we had seen her looking into the carriages as in search of something. That something was the jewel case which was then in the compartment in which Frank had travelled down."

"After seeing it, and noticing the number of the carriage she disappeared, as she did not wish to attract too much attention, and when she returned she committed the very natural mistake of getting into the compartment where the jewels had been, instead of the carriage into which they had been removed."

"As it happened I stood in front of the window so that she could not see the interior of the compartment, and when she had got in the train was moving, and it was too late for her to get out."

"You have told me the questions she asked you, and they prove her desire to discover Frank's whereabouts. Then, at the entrance of the tunnel she got out the chloroform, and while you were under its influence contrived to get from one carriage to the next."

"I have not the smallest doubt that after the commission of the crime and securing the jewels the wretch left the train while it was still in the tunnel, thinking there was less risk of being seen."

"Evidently she knew the line well, and was thoroughly acquainted with this part of the country. I do not believe it was what the police would call 'a London job' at all. My own impression is that I shall find the murderer

within a radius of ten miles of the spot where poor Frank met his death."

"I have made inquiries as to whether a person answering the description of the old lady was seen anywhere near the line during that afternoon, but I am met with a blank negative."

"One, boy, however, who is supposed to be half-witted, and is employed to frighten the crows in a field of wheat close to the railway, says he saw a man climbing up the embankment a little farther on, and that this man carried a bundle in his hand which no doubt held the jewel case."

"Which end of the tunnel did he come from?" asked Vera, who had followed each point very attentively.

"The one nearest Graystoke, and he struck across the fields in the direction of Graystoke. You see it is quite possible he changed his clothes in the tunnel, but from the description of the parcel given by the boy, I do not think it could have been large enough to contain them, therefore he must have hidden them somewhere."

"Was not the interior of the tunnel searched?"

"It was, but not thoroughly until the next day, and it is likely enough that in the meantime the man may have come back and taken the clothes from the place where he had hidden them. That confirms my impression that he must live in the neighbourhood."

"It seems to me," said Vera, thoughtfully, "that you ought to make inquiries of the captain of the ship who brought over the jewels from India. Through him you might find out who was likely to know of their arrival in England, and of their value."

"You are right. I will lose no time in adopting your suggestion," Maurice answered. Then he added, "I felt sure you would help me. A woman often sees points that a man misses. Now," he said, coming to a standstill and smiling—a very pallid smile, by the way—"I suppose I ought not to keep you any longer. Shall I write to you and let you know how my inquiries progress?"

"No," she replied after a pause, during which it occurred to her that in all probability her letters would pass through the hands of Mrs. Graham before they reached her—if indeed they reached her at all.

"I think you had better not write. But I will meet you again in a few days' time, if you think I can be of any assistance to you."

She made the suggestion with the most perfect innocence, and he accepted it as it was meant.

"Very well. But how shall I let you know when I have any news for you?"

Vera's quick wit soon gave an answer. She looked round and pointed to an old-thorn tree, now covered with snowy blossoms.

"Stick a ring dove's feather—you will find plenty about—on that lowest thorn bush; and if I can't come I will contrive to take away the feather and substitute a scrap of white linen in its place. I can tear up my handkerchief if necessary," she added, smiling. "Now, goodbye."

He took her hand and held it, looking searchingly in her face as he did so. When he spoke it was with some slight hesitation.

"I am not sure that I have a right to ask you this; but, since the morning, when I saw you with your step-mother, sundry doubts have haunted me. Are you happy at home?"

Poor Vera's colour faded, and she looked down.

"Forgive me if I have vexed you," he exclaimed, with quick contrition. "I only wanted to say that if you are in trouble or difficulty I shall hold it as my greatest privilege to help you. Do you believe this?"

She raised her eyes, and they met the earnest gaze of his. A thrill of delicious confidence ran through her.

"Yes," she murmured, "I believe it."

"And you will not hesitate to make use of me if occasion requires it?"

Shyly and sweetly she gave the required promise, and then she left him, he standing by the gates to watch her graceful figure until it was out of sight. After that he walked down the lane to where his horse was waiting, tethered to a tree.

"She is a splendid creature," he muttered to himself. "He will be a lucky man who wins her love!"

And then he sighed restlessly. What had he to do with love—he who had dedicated his life to a mission of vengeance!

And yet he knew that for weal or for woe his heart had gone from him into the keeping of this beautiful Veronica Graham.

Meanwhile she was running swiftly up the avenue, startled as she saw how dark it was. Her interview with Maurice had lasted longer than she fancied, and the last ray of daylight had faded from the west, while a few stars twinkled from between heavy ragged clouds up in the sky.

The Grange looked dark and deserted as usual, not a light shone from its front. An owl flew out of the ivy with a harsh discordant shriek as Vera made her way round to the window through which she had escaped from the house.

To her dismay she found it shut and fastened.

She stood still for a few moments thinking. She did not wish to let the household know of her absence if she could possibly help it, especially as it was so late, for she knew that her step-mother would at once suspect and question her.

Her knowledge of the exits of the house was limited, and the only possible entrance she could think of was through the French window in her father's study. There was a chance that it might be left unfastened; a very slender chance it is true; but even if this were not the case she might force the hasp up with her penknife, supposing the shutter were not closed.

Not very hopefully she stole round the house to the eastern side, where a small plantation of shrubs interposed between the terrace and the moat. These sheltered her advance, and she took advantage of them until she was directly opposite the study window. No, there were no shutters, and as she crept up close to the window she saw that it was not even fastened, indeed, it was ajar, the inside curtains being drawn, and thus screening the interior of the room from view.

With a mental thanksgiving for such good luck Vera stepped in, but just as she was on the point of pulling aside the curtain she heard the sound of voices, and she stopped short, afraid either to advance or retreat.

"I tell you there is danger in the girl remaining here," Mrs. Graham was saying, vehemently. "Sooner or later she is sure to do everything out, and then what is to become of us, I should like to know!"

There was no answer, but a match was struck as if the person addressed were lighting a cigar; a faint odour of the smoke came behind the curtains.

"The best thing we can do is to send her away at once," went on madame. "I can manage to get her out of the house to-morrow without her suspecting anything."

"No, you can't," was Mr. Graham's reply, and his voice seemed stronger and firmer than his daughter had heard it before. "You exaggerate the danger. If you keep your head it will be all right."

"I tell you you are wrong. The girl is no fool, and she suspects things are not as they should be. She'll be certain of it presently."

"And what if she is?"

"Well, we shall be ruined, that's all."

"You women are so foolish," exclaimed her companion, scornfully. "You are always knocking your heads against stone walls in the effort to see what's on the other side. Haven't I pulled through successfully up to now, and is there any reason why my good luck should desert me?"

"Things have never been quite so desperate before," muttered madame, uneasily.

"Bosh! you talk as if you were in your teens, instead of being a well-seasoned woman of—"

"Go on!" she exclaimed, bitterly. "Why don't you and what you were going to, a woman of nearly middle age!"

"I refrained out of regard for your feelings," he returned, carelessly. "Confound this cigar! How badly it smokes. I'll get a box of another brand next time I go to town."

"You think a great deal more of your cigar than of my feelings!"

"Don't talk nonsense, Adela. I can't imagine what's come over you. You have been quite different since Vera's arrival. By jove! I believe you are jealous of the girl!"

He laughed long and heartily, as if enjoying the joke. Then he added,—

"Suppose, after all, she does suspect, there won't be any special harm done. I shall exercise a little of my paternal authority, and she won't betray me, no girl will betray her own father whatever he may be."

Madame laughed scornfully; then she said, in a slightly lowered voice,—

"Do you think it is dark enough for us to venture into the plantation now?"

"Quite. Is everything ready?"

"Yes, except the lantern, and I'll fetch that now. Perhaps," she added, uneasily, "we had better wait another hour!"

"What for? The girl is in bed and asleep, and if we take Nero with us he'll keep off all other intruders. You are getting very nervous, Adela. I should recommend a tonic."

Vera had listened to this conversation in growing bewilderment. The voice certainly belonged to her father, and yet it was quite different to the one in which he usually addressed her.

As the door closed behind madame the young girl flung aside the curtains and stepped into the room.

The sudden blaze of light from the lamp dazzled her, coming as she did out of the darkness, and involuntarily she put up her hand to shade her eyes.

At the same moment there was a crash. The lamp was thrown to the ground, and the room was in darkness.

(To be continued.)

BRENDA'S GUARDIAN.

—30—

CHAPTER XI.

"It is really very odd I don't hear from Sir Marmaduke," remarked Guy Cameron, one bright June morning when the roses peeped in at the open window, wafting their sweet perfume to the table where the master of the Castle sat at breakfast with his mother and ward.

"It is more than odd," agreed Lady Mary, "for you know he promised to come back and finish his visit. He put us off with one night instead of a week because he said he had some business to attend to; but I quite expected him back in a few days, instead of which he hasn't even written a line."

"It's not like Sir Marmaduke," said Sir Guy, anxiously. "He's the most courteous fellow going. I really feel inclined to write to his rooms in Dolphin-street and ask if there is anything the matter."

"It is just a month since he went," said Lady Mary. "Why don't you run up to London, Guy, and call on him? Like you I begin to feel uneasy; besides, you really ought to pay another visit to London while the season lasts."

"I don't care a fig for the season," replied her son; "but I really think I will run up next week if we don't hear anything of Tremaine in the meanwhile."

Lady Mary took up her letters and rose to go to her own sitting-room, where she usually spent the morning.

Brenda was going out through the French window when Sir Guy interrupted her.

"Will you come into the library for a minute? I have something to show you."

But when they got there he was so long before he spoke that Brenda grew alarmed.

"I wish you'd make haste," she said, pettishly. "Of course you are going to scold me. You never want to speak to me except for that, and I should like to get it over."

Sir Guy sighed. It was strange that he could not "get on" with his ward. This girl, the only child of two people he had once dearly loved, seemed to willfully misunderstand everything he did or said.

"I am sorry my guardianship is so irksome to you," he said, stiffly. "However, it is not likely to last long. It was about this I wanted to speak to you to-day."

"Yes."

How provoking she was! She might surely have tried to help him out.

"I have had a letter from Mr. Ainslie."

Brenda suppressed a yawn.

"I don't think I feel interested in your correspondence, Sir Guy, and Mr. Ainslie is almost the dullest person in the neighbourhood. If his letters are as prosy as his conversation you are welcome to the monopoly of them."

"Brenda. I wish you would be serious."

"I am perfectly serious, Sir Guy. I don't like the Ainslies. If they happen to be special friends of yours I am sorry to seem rude, but—I don't like them."

"Fred Ainslie is a most worthy young fellow. He is twenty-five, and though at present his income is small he is the direct heir to a peerage."

"He told me so the other day. I believe he thought it would make an impression on me—but I suppose I am a radical, for I don't think titles make people any better."

"Probably he hoped it might further his wishes. Fred Ainslie is honestly in love with you, Brenda, and he has written to me as your guardian to ask my consent to his paying his addresses to you."

"I hope you said 'No'!"

"I have said nothing. I could not till I had spoken to you. Brenda, won't you believe that my mother and I desire your happiness above all things!"

"I think that Lady Mary does."

"And you do not believe that I—"

"I believe you would do anything in the world to get rid of me," the spoilt child answered frantically, "or else you would not be trying to persuade me to marry a man I despise."

"I never wanted to persuade you, Brenda. Your father's will decrees that my consent is necessary to your marriage until you are twenty-five. I am only telling you that I could give my consent fully and freely to your union with Fred Ainslie."

"But I could not give mine."

"I suppose you are quite sure!" asked Sir Guy, tentatively. "You won't take a few days to think it over?"

"My answer would be just the same."

"I suppose I can't expect to understand girls," said poor Sir Guy, "for I really thought you liked young Ainslie; when you have been to the Court you always seem to have paired off with him."

"Well, he always wanted to pair off with me," said Brenda. "Besides, Sir Guy, to tell you a secret, I particularly dislike his mother and sister. Compared to Mrs. Ainslie and Kate, Fred Ainslie is—charming."

Sir Guy smiled.

"Then we agree for once. I have known Mrs. Ainslie all my life, and—I detest her."

"What has she done to offend you?"

"I can't tell you; she always strikes me as not quite true. Fred, poor fellow, is as honest as the day, but I can't say as much for his woman-kind."

"And yet you wanted me to spend my whole life with them?"

"I did not want it, I wished you to decide for yourself."

"I pity Fred Ainslie's wife," said Brenda, wickedly; "his mother will sneer at her and Kate try to sit upon her; the young woman will have a very bad time of it between them."

"Well, Brenda, am I to write to Fred or will you see him yourself?"

"Oh, you can write to him; say I have not the least intention of marrying anyone; certainly not a man encumbered with a disagreeable mother and sister."

"I'll leave the last half out please," said Sir Guy. "Brenda, will you tell me why you dislike Mrs. Ainslie and her daughter? I grant you they are not very amiable women, but I think they have always shown their most amiable side to you."

"Not always," said Brenda, bitterly; "only last week Mrs. Ainslie told me I ought to marry young, because the sins of the parents are visited upon the children. I shouldn't have cared what she said about myself, but to dare to hint it was a sin for father to make a fortune in trade made me furious. My father was a gentleman, whatever he did, and for miles and miles round where he lived his name was known and blessed. Yet this old woman, in a little country place, dares to talk of his sins just because she thinks trade *infra dig.*"

Sir Guy knew perfectly that Mrs. Ainslie had never intended to refer to Mr. Norton's (that is Lord Hazelmere's) exploits in Africa; she was thinking of a dark passage in his life, ended before he left his native land; but her guardian had no intention of correcting Brenda's mistake; indeed, he was thankful for the error which might save her much pain.

"You generally fly off at a tangent when I advise you child," said Cameron gravely; "but I must try once more, Mrs. Ainslie and her daughter are simply wrapped up in Fred; when they hear that you have refused him they will not feel very friendly towards you."

"I don't care how they feel."

"Will you do this one thing for me," pleaded Sir Guy, "avoid the Court as much as you possibly can? Mrs. Ainslie is not a pleasant woman to offend; she has a very sharp and malicious tongue."

"I am sure I don't want to go to the Court," said Brenda. "I never cared either for her or Kate, but they would keep on asking me."

A pause.

Brenda knew that Sir Guy had "said his say," but she lingered because she wanted to talk to him on her own account.

"Sir Guy."

He started.

"What is it, Brenda?"

"Please write very plainly to Mr. Ainslie, so plainly that he can't possibly misunderstand. I don't want to see him; I should hate it if he spoke to me alone."

"I'll do my best; but, Brenda, I am afraid you will have to get used to these little matters; as a beauty and an heiress you are sure to have plenty of them."

"I'm not a beauty," said Brenda quickly, "at least, Mrs. Lennox always told me my mother was ten times prettier than I am. As for the money, I hate it. I should like to throw it at the bottom of the sea."

"You won't say so when you are older," said Sir Guy, gravely.

"Yes, I shall; I hate the very sound of money. If my father had not been a rich man I should have been spared the sorrow of my life."

She did not say what that sorrow was. She went out of the room hastily, as though she regretted having said so much, and Sir Guy sat down to write to Mr. Ainslie with very mingled feelings.

Trying and capricious as was his wilful ward he could not be sorry he was to keep her yet a little longer as the sunshine of his home, but he was frightened—positively frightened—of the result of his letter on Mrs. Ainslie and her daughter.

They were women of a type often met with in small country towns—narrow, prejudiced, and malicious.

Guy Cameron knew their natures, and had read their tactics like an open book. They were poor—for their position, desperately poor.

The present Lord Ainslie had quarrelled with his brother on his marriage, and refused to see either his widow or children. This imperious relative was only sixty-five (Mrs. Ainslie's own age), and possessed a splendid constitution. He might live to be ninety. Meanwhile a slender jointure of five hundred a year was all the family at the Court had to live on. True the house was their own; but as Fred had been bred to no profession, as Mrs. Ainslie never forgot she was an Honourable's wife, and expected to move in the best society, their life was one continual struggle to keep up appearances, and make both ends meet.

That her children should marry young and

choose rich partners was the widow's one desire. Kate would gladly have gratified her, but no one came to the Court a wooing, and Fred obstinately refused to "go in for an heiress" unless the heiress were young and fair to see.

Therefore, when the Hon. Miss Hazelmere, with her old name and her enormous wealth, her grace and beauty, came to Bankshire, Mrs. Ainslie was delighted, and regarded her as Fred's destiny.

Mother and sister courted the heiress assiduously; Fred honestly fell in love with her. Sir Guy saw what was going on, but uttered no warning.

Lord Hazelmere's will placed him in a very delicate position. Since his refusal to consent to Brenda's marriage would enrich himself at her cost he was bound to sanction any match not positively undesirable.

He really liked Fred. The Ainslies were of a good old family, and with Brenda's money the young couple could enjoy a separate establishment well removed from the Court and its influence, so Guy left things to fate; but for all that he was intensely horrified when he thought of the open enmity his letter would cause, and he even turned over in his head various plans for keeping his ward and the family at the Court apart; but in a small country place, where persons in the name "set" meet continually at other people's houses, he was fain to confess it was impossible.

Brenda had gone straight to her own room. She wanted time to think over what she had just heard. She did not wish to see Lady Mary until her crimson cheeks had regained their usual creamy whiteness.

When preparations were made to receive the heiress at Cameron Castle Lady Mary had chosen for her use four rooms which stood together at the end of one wing. They communicated, though each had a separate entrance on to the corridor, at the end of which was a door opening to a private staircase leading down to the grounds. In olden days this had been the nursery domain; later on the rooms had been allotted to Ivy Nairn and her cousin Susan, and it seemed to Lady Mary only natural to give them now to Ivy's child.

Very pretty and homelike was the outer room, which was half-study, half-boudoir. Here Brenda kept her books, and many of the treasures she had brought with her from Africa.

Beyond was her bedroom, which opened in its turn on another apartment, where Alice Brown sat to do needlework, well within reach of her lady's bell. In the last room of all the maid slept.

Lady Mary had been very pleased to welcome her old *protégée* back to the Castle, and had assured Brenda again and again she could not have brought an attendant more to her mind than Alice Brown.

Alice, never overstepped her place. She was always the skillful needlewoman, the respectful servant, but she took an interest in her young lady no ordinary maid would have done. She never forgot that Brenda had been the means of letting her see her native land again, and she would have gone through fire and water for her young mistress.

Brenda flung herself into a low chair by the open window, so that the summer breeze might fan her hot cheeks. Apart from Fred Ainslie's proposal she had a heavy care on her mind.

She, like the Camerons, had wondered at Sir Marmaduke's silence; but, unlike Sir Guy and his mother, she knew what his plans had been on leaving the Castle, and with the nameless dread she felt of John Trelawny she was growing more and more uneasy at Sir Marmaduke's silence.

He was going straight to Penfold Manor to demand from its master the particulars of his brother's death. Now if Trelawny had really stolen the dead man's wealth, (Poor Darkie might have made a fortune at the mines unknown to his brother.) He was not a man to stand at much, and he might have done Sir Marmaduke an injury just to prevent his denouncing him. That was the doubt which tortured Brenda. She could not, she dared not carry her story to Guy Cameron.

He would have asked, and naturally, what had given her such an evil opinion of his old friend's nephew. She could not confess Trelawny had taught her to deceive her father, and at the moment when that dear father was killed she had been holding a clandestine meeting with her lover.

She would have died of very shame if she had tried to tell that story to Sir Guy, for though she never tried to please him, though she seemed to delight in showing herself to him in her worst colours, yet she valued his good opinion above all earthly things. She would have done a great deal for one word of approbation from him.

If she had possessed Sir Marmaduke's address she would have written to him herself and begged him to send word how he had fared on his mission to Penfold Manor; but she did not like to ask Sir Guy for it as he would wonder at her wanting to write to her father's foe. Brenda fondly hoped that Trelawny had given up all pursuit of herself. Not only did she think her change of name would baffle him, but having heard he had gone down to Hampshire and taken possession of the Manor it seemed to her she was safe. If Trelawny had meant to look for her he would have stayed in London!

Her musings were interrupted presently by a sound like a smothered sob. She listened, and it came again. Convinced that someone was in trouble near her Brenda went into her bedroom. It was empty, but she could hear the sound of weeping, and looking into the work-room she discovered Alice Brown leaning back in a chair, her face hidden in her hands, while she wept tears of such bitter anguish as wrung Brenda's tender heart to hear.

This woman was something more to her than a maid. Brenda always felt a certain likeness in their fates linked them together as sisters of sorrow. Both had a secret they fain would hide from all the world. Both feared to be discovered by a man whom they had once loved but now hated.

True Alice Brown's husband might be in Africa, while Brenda's quondam lover was certainly in England; but the same dread possessed them both. Brenda had noticed again and again how Alice shrank from going out. She rarely ventured even in the Castle grounds.

The heiress of untold wealth, the daughter of a grand old name, put one hand kindly on the weeping woman's shoulder, and asked gently,—

"What is the matter, Alice; surely you can trust me!"

But Alice Brown wept on, it really seemed that the flood-gates of her grief once opened she had no power to restrain her tears.

"Only trust me," pleaded Brenda, "and I will find some way to help you. Is it the old trouble? Have you heard from him?"

As Alice slowly and reluctantly uncovered her face Brenda was shocked at the change in it.

"He'll be here to-morrow morning, Miss Brenda, to take me away. But I'll never go with him; I'd throw myself into the river first!"

She handed Brenda a tumbled sheet of paper, on which was written in a man's large bold hand,—

"Having unearthed you at last, my dutiful and loving wife, I propose to be at Cameron Castle the morning after you receive this. The law will not allow Sir Guy and his mother to harbour a wife against her husband's orders; besides, Lady Mary's views on wifely duty and submission are so well known, that her influence will be on my side. Till to-morrow, then, adieu."

Brenda's heart ached for the girl as she read it. She had not lived three months in close intercourse with Lady Mary Cameron without discovering her views were the old-fashioned ones, that women must suffer all things at the hands of the man they have married. Lady Mary believed firmly no marriage could be unhappy unless there were faults on both sides, and that no earthly indignity justified a woman in leaving her husband.

This doctrine used to be universal, but nowadays many venture to dissent from it; and it is noticeable that the women who preach it most

faithfully are the wives of exceptionally good husbands, women who cannot know or understand a tittle of what their less fortunate sisters have to bear.

There used to be a notion that a man who ill-treated his wife could not be a gentleman; either it is exploded or people have changed their minds as to what ill-treatment means. Nowadays a man may treat his wife with systematic neglect, may freeze every warm feeling in her heart by icy indifference, may show her silently from week's end to week's end that he cares nothing about her, and yet not only be considered a gentleman still but pose as a religious man, a philanthropist, a public benefactor.

Ill-treatment was never meant to refer only to a woman's body; it is surely crueler to wound her heart or starve her affections than to knock her down or deprive her of food. But the world, as represented by Lady Mary Cameron and others of her type, does not recognise this, and so life wages on, and the one thing a man may break without fear of damages or public disapproval is his wife's heart!

Brenda Hazelmere knew this perfectly, and as she bent over the weeping Alice she knew also if once her husband—strange that she had never spoken his name—reached Cameron Castle all the sympathies of its mistress would be on his side.

"You must go away," she said, sadly. "Oh, Alice, I shall miss you terribly; but it is the only thing to do."

Quickly she made her plans and communicated them to Alice. Mrs. Lennox was now living in a small house in Kennington, for Brenda's sake she would receive Alice, and if she could not keep her in her own service would find her some place where she could honestly earn her bread.

"You must slip off while dinner is going on in the servants' hall," said Brenda. "I will tell the housekeeper you are not well and do not want dinner, then they will not come near here till about tea time. You won't be able to carry any luggage, it is so far to the station; besides, you might meet someone on the stairs. If you have nothing in your hand you could say you were going to get a breath of air."

She had opened her purse and taken out a little pile of gold and notes.

"Nonsense," she said, as Alice shook her head, "you must take them. Mrs. Lennox may be away from home, and then you would have to go into lodgings. Besides, in any case, you will want money for your outfit if you take another place. I would give you more only I think this will be enough."

"It will be more than enough. Oh, Miss Brenda, I'd do anything in the world to stay with you."

Brenda stayed with Alice until the gong sounded for lunch; then she went downstairs, pausing on her way to take her message to the housekeeper.

"She did look ill at breakfast, Miss Hazelmere," observed that functionary; "shall I go up and see to her?"

"She said she would rather keep quiet," said Brenda; "perhaps if she doesn't come down by four you would send her a cup of tea."

Brenda herself could hardly eat or drink; she was thankful Sir Guy was not present, but she had much ado to part with Lady Mary's remembrance.

"I am quite well; it's only that I am not hungry. I think the heat must have taken away my appetite."

"It must have been hotter in Africa," suggested Lady Mary.

Brenda kept her hostess in sight all that afternoon. She wanted to be quite sure no one discovered Alice's flight before the servants' tea hour.

Lady Mary wondered why Brenda proposed a stroll in the shrubbery, and why—if she found it so hot—she did not, at least, send Alice for her hat and sunshade; but she had grown very fond of her son's ward, and in telling Brenda a long story of her own young days the afternoon ebbed pleasantly away, and it was nearly five when they went indoors, to find Mrs. Holmes standing in the hall with a white scared face.

CHAPTER XII.

HUMAN nature is pretty much alike in all ranks of life. We none of us particularly enjoy hearing of the virtue of our predecessor. Mrs. Holmes was comparatively a new comers at Cameron Castle, and she was weary to death of the praises of the good homely woman who had preceded her, even venturing to remark—in the sacred privacy of her own sitting-room—to a favoured gossip, she wondered my lady let such a person as Mrs. Brown's daughter be about Miss Hazelmere, as from all accounts the young woman was a very black sheep, no matter what her mother had been!

So that from the moment of coming back to the Castle with Brenda poor Alice had had one enemy ever present, and, perhaps, she feared the martinet below stairs as much as Lady Mary when she told her young mistress there was no safety for her but in flight.

As Lady Mary and Brenda entered from the garden Holmes advanced with her story.

"The young woman has made off, my lady. I can only hope she has stolen nothing of Miss Hazelmere's."

"I don't understand," said the mistress, much perplexed; "what do you mean, Holmes; of whom are you speaking?"

"Of Alice Browne, my lady; least ways the person who has called herself so. I went up just now to take her a cup of tea with my own hands, and she's gone; the room's strewn with her things, as though she didn't make up her mind what to leave and what to take, and I found this note addressed to you."

Lady Mary took it, but before she opened it she turned to Brenda.

"Had you any reason to think Alice was discontented, or that she meditated this step, dear?"

"I am sure she was not discontented," said Brenda; "she has told me over and over again how pleased she was to be back in England."

Lady Mary opened the letter, but did not read its contents aloud, which greatly disappointed Mrs. Holmes.

"My Lady,—

"The man the law calls my husband is on my track, and I have no chance of escape but by leaving you. May Heaven bless you for your kindness to her who once was

"ALICE BROWNE."

"Alice has left," said Lady Mary to the housekeeper; "if she sends her address her things can be sent after her. She ought to have given me notice, but I daresay we can find another maid for Miss Hazelmere."

"We could find a dozen who'd behave more gratefully than Alice Browne has done, my lady," said Holmes, with a sniff.

In the pretty boudoir tea stood waiting, but Brenda Hazelmere seemed in no mood for tea or food of any sort. She leant back in her chair with a white and face.

"This has upset you," said her hostess. "I told Guy it was a great mistake for you to have a woman with such a story about you. I am very sorry for Alice, but, of course, we have only heard her version of her husband's character; no doubt there were faults on both sides."

"He must have been pretty bad for her to prefer what was almost starvation in Cape Town to going back to him," said Brenda.

"You are too young to understand these things," said Lady Mary. "I know you are attached to Alice, but you can't defend her strange conduct. I wonder what Guy will say to it!"

"Is Sir Guy coming to tea?" asked Brenda, suddenly, conscious she had not seen her guardian since their tête-à-tête concerning Fred Ainslie's suit.

"No. Didn't I tell you? He has gone to London."

"To London! He never mentioned it at breakfast!" exclaimed Brenda.

"I don't suppose he knew it then. He had a telegram about eleven o'clock, and he started at once."

"Has he gone to see Sir Marmaduke Tremaine?" asked Brenda, nervously.

"No. I begged him to call in Dolphin-street, but he told me he might not have time. He has gone to Kensington to see Mrs. Lennox. I have no wish to speak against your governess, Brenda; but I really don't think she ought to send for my son like this. This is the third time he has rushed off to London at a minute's notice in answer to a telegram from Mrs. Lennox."

"And I did not even know he had seen her since we parted at Southampton."

"Guy is the most reserved man I ever knew," complained his mother; "but he might have told you. You would have liked perhaps to send Mrs. Lennox a message."

"I should like to see her," said Brenda. "I told Sir Guy once I wanted to go and spend a week with her, but he would not hear of it."

Lady Mary seemed lost in thought.

"Has Mrs. Lennox worn well? I mean does she look young for her age?"

"I don't know. I never thought about it," returned Brenda, much puzzled. "Why do you ask?"

"Guy is nearly forty," said his mother, very gravely. "So there would not be much disparity in age. I cannot in the least understand his rushing about at her bidding. I have begun to wonder whether he—he liked her."

"He told me he liked her very much," said Brenda, simply. "I can't fancy anyone not doing so."

"Ah, but I don't mean a common liking. Men do marry women older than themselves sometimes."

"Marry!" there was a ring of positive amusement in Brenda's voice. "Mrs. Lennox marry again? Why, I am sure she wouldn't, not if a real live prince proposed to her. She has never forgotten her husband; besides, she has got her life work to do. She has told me over and over again her one object in life was to find her cousin."

"Her cousin," there was a strange alarm in Lady Mary's voice. "What do you know about her cousin?"

"Very little," answered Brenda. "I don't think Mrs. Lennox would have told me anything, only I was so hurt at her leaving me she had to explain. Ivy Nairn (isn't it a pretty name) was a cousin of my mother's too, but she did something long ago my father disapproved of, and then he would never speak to her again. Mrs. Lennox was away with her husband when it happened. As soon as she was a widow she came to us, because she had promised my mother to take care of me; but she always made up her mind as soon as she came back to England she would give up her life to looking for Ivy."

Lady Mary wiped her eyes. "She is a good woman, and I think, my dear, I am getting a foolish one. I have actually wondered lately if there could be anything between her and Guy."

"Nothing," said Brenda, firmly. "I couldn't even fancy Goody marrying again. I don't mean I think it's unlikely, but that it's impossible."

"You are very fond of her?"

Brenda sighed.

"Very, though there was always a shadow between us. Even when I was quite a child I always knew she and my father shared a secret they kept from me. Now I can understand better, and I feel sometimes she must have hated me, tiresome child that I was, just because her promise to my mother to take care of me kept her from Ivy."

Lady Mary looked very grave.

"Do you mean she really hopes to find her cousin after all these years?"

"Yes."

"She must have wonderful confidence."

"I don't think it is that," said Brenda, simply.

"She is a good woman, and she has prayed for Ivy always. I think she believes that all her prayers can't be unanswered. She is prepared to find her cousin in poverty and sickness. I must say," said Brenda, "I should like to see this Miss Nairn. She must be wonderfully fascinating for anyone to love her so."

"She was a wicked woman," said Lady Mary,

bitterly, "a cruel, heartless woman, and I hope you may never see her, dear. It will be an evil day for you when you meet Ivy Nairn, she brought trouble on every one connected with her always."

The butler came in and bore away the tea tray; Brenda took up a book, her thoughts were too unconnected for her to talk comfortably and even if she did not turn a page in half an hour, or read a line of the print, the volume would be a shield from conversation.

But it did not prove so; Lady Mary came over to the sofa and sat down by Brenda.

"I don't want to interrupt you, dear, but there is one thing I must say."

Brenda dropped her book.

"Have I done anything to vex you?" she asked, wistfully.

"Nothing, dear; but have you forgotten we are engaged to a tennis party at the Court to-morrow afternoon?"

Brenda grew rosy red.

"I can't go, Lady Mary, I really can't."

"I know," said her kind old friend. "Guy has told me of Fred Ainslie's wishes, and I think you have acted quite rightly. It is most unfortunate we should be engaged to his mother to-morrow; you see she is a dangerous woman if offended; if we both stay away she will construe it into an affront; yet if you go it will be most awkward for you."

"I can't go," said Brenda. "I simply can't. I should be afraid of Mrs. Ainslie publicly denouncing me to her guests as a heartless upstart."

Lady Mary seemed lost in thought.

"I wish it hadn't happened," she said at last.

"The Ainslies are our nearest neighbours, I have never liked them, but I am in a measure bound to meet them constantly. If waiting for a week or month would get us out of the difficulty I would send an excuse for to-morrow, but I must see Mrs. Ainslie and Kate sooner or later, so it is only putting off the evil day."

"Would you go to-morrow—alone?"

"And leave you to be mopped by yourself all the afternoon?"

"I shouldn't feel dull, and I would do anything rather than you should have any unpleasantness. If we both stay away Mrs. Ainslie will think it a slight, but if you go and explain I am not very well, she can't take offence."

"Perhaps I had better go, then; if I am there she can't discuss us with her other guests."

"I wish she would move."

"There's no chance of it," said Lady Mary, "she has the use of the Court for life."

"Is everyone like that?" asked Brenda bitterly.

"Think how kind she and Kate seemed to me at first, just for a little while I thought they really liked me; only too soon I discovered it was my detestable money which made them so amiable."

"Ah, Brenda, you will have to choose a husband," said Lady Mary, cheerfully; "no one else can protect you from fortune hunters."

Brenda shuddered.

"I shall never marry," she said firmly; "you will never hear my wedding bells."

Lady Mary looked at her gravely.

"Have you left a lover behind you in Africa, my dear; do you talk so bitterly about love because you have deserted some old admirer over the sea?"

"No! how can you think so meanly of me!" cried the girl. "If 'lover' means one who loves me I don't possess such a thing on the face of the earth."

"You forget Mr. Ainslie."

Brenda sighed.

"I don't count him. It was my fortune he wanted, not me. No, Lady Mary, I am quite satisfied with my freedom, I never want to marry any man."

(To be continued.)

THE use of the telephone on Australian sheep ranches is becoming common. The sheep and shepherds are watched and handled telephonically, by means of six stations all communicating with a central point, from which come weather signals, orders, etc.

STRAYED AWAY.

—10:—

CHAPTER XVI.—(continued.)

THE widow suppressed a sigh. She was determined in her inmost heart to risk that miserable dullness.

"Better now than later," she thought. "His affection is deepening each day, and she would see it were she here longer; and when she finds what a worthless idol she has cherished how could she help loving such a noble fellow as Arthur?"

Mrs. Wilson acted with the quiet resolution familiar to women of strong sense and will—she did not tell Arthur what her intentions were.

Next day she tried to elicit some information from Fanny that would enable her to sift the matter thoroughly; but the girl was faithful to her trust.

"Think of me as you will," said Fanny, "and think of me as gently as you can. I must say nothing more."

"But for your own sake, my child—for the sake of your baby."

"For his sake," said Fanny, with a sob, "I would do anything—lay down my very life; but you must not ask me to tell what I have promised never to tell."

"You have a secret," said Mrs. Wilson, with grave compassion, "and you are keeping it to your own injury. I should be sorry to think I have been mistaken in the nature of that secret."

Fanny upturned her tearful eyes, and looked at her kind friend.

"Do you doubt me too?" she asked in a tone that went to Mrs. Wilson's heart, but did not shake her purpose.

"I want to help you," was the response. "It has occurred to me, as it has to Arthur, that you are the victim of a misunderstanding. Tell us how we may assist you!"

"I should have to tell you everything, and I cannot do that."

"But, my poor child, see what you are doing. Things cannot go on in this way for ever. How is he to find you—should he wish to find you—unless you take measures to find him!—and that you cannot do alone."

"Heaven will help me," said Fanny, simply. "Come what may, he shall never say I have broken my promise and been his ruin."

Mrs. Wilson took Fanny's hand.

"Your secret is no secret to me," she said, quietly. "The gentleman who ran away with and then deserted you is Mr. Percy Falkland. Arthur knows it too, and is determined to find out why he has not answered your letters."

"In mercy," implored Fanny, "do not let him. Oh, this is so cruel! He would blame me, and never, never forgive me."

"Not forgive his wife for telling him that she and her child were on the verge of want! You are his wife. Tell me truly. Are you not?"

The poor girl, faithful to her vow, shook her head through a rain of blinding tears. That rash oath, taken in the depth of her love, made her strike herself the second bitter blow now—brand herself in the sight of a dear friend, and she was sure Arthur would hear the sorrowful denial.

"You will not tell him," she said, sinking into the arms open in pity to receive her. "I should like him to think well of me."

"I will not tell him," Mrs. Wilson promised, kissing the tearful face. "He shall always think well of you, my poor girl. I am only sorry that he thinks too much of you. I shall be sorry to let you go, Frances, but you must not stay here."

Fanny shivered. She had expected that, but it was not the less painful when it came.

"For his sake, perhaps for yours," said the low, sad voice. "He loves you, Frances, with a passion that may break the beauty of his life; and I am sure you would not sacrifice my son."

"Oh, madam, I have been so happy, so peaceful here!"

"And I wish you could remain for ever," said Mrs. Wilson, in a tone as tender as she would have used in speaking to a daughter; "but I want you to be out of his way. It will be better for you both."

CHAPTER XVII.

IN THE WIDE WORLD.

ARTHUR WILSON went to his bank in the morning, and returned to Paxton-street in the evening, supremely unconscious of the plot going on at home. The widow was careful not to hint to him that she was decided on Fanny's departure.

The young man gave many a thought to his mother's pretty lodger and her tiny boy while shovelling up sovereigns by the score or counting out crisp banknotes by the dozen; and he often smiled, though he smiled rather sadly, at Mrs. Wilson's fear that his affection for Fanny might exceed the proprieties.

"As if there could be no such thing in the world," he said, "as a pure and disinterested love between a man like myself and a beautiful girl whom a scoundrel has deserted."

There were those who, while they admired Arthur for his generous intentions, would have said the widow was wiser than her son.

Time is a sad dispeller of illusions, and Mrs. Wilson felt sure that Arthur's dream of soul passion was an illusion.

It took Fanny some time to comprehend what Mrs. Wilson said regarding Arthur; but it did not take her long to penetrate Mrs. Wilson's motives in wishing her to go.

"I am not worthy to sit in his presence since I have made her think me the thing I am not," thought Fanny, bitterly. "I see what an outcast I might become if it were true. It is the way of the world, I suppose, especially with women. The man who was stripped and beaten by robbers found a good Samaritan—a human being; but it was only the Redeemer who looked with pity on the Magdalen."

Fanny was very young to think so bitterly of life, but she began to wonder what would become of her if Percy did not return soon.

Mrs. Wilson was kind to her to the last. Fanny did not care to stay in Paxton-street after the intimation given her.

She was proud in the midst of her sorrow, and she wanted to be away from those who knew so much of her story.

Always avoiding Lambeth she took apartments in Pimlico—two small rooms on a second floor, for which she paid nine shillings a week.

It was not the best part of Pimlico either, and Fanny felt that she was descending—from St. John's-wood to Baker-street, Baker-street to Holloway, Paxton-street to a bye turning in Pimlico. She was drifting back towards the humbler Lambeth by degrees.

Arthur did not know when or where she was going. The apartments were taken nearly a week before she went, and Fanny sent her boxes in advance.

She went early on the day of her departure. She shed some tears while putting on her baby's hood and cloak for the last time in that quiet back drawing-room. It was hard to leave the only friends she had known since Percy went away.

"I should have liked to have said good-bye to Mr. Wilson," she said, when she and her baby were dressed, and the cab stood at the door; "but you will say it for me. Tell him, please, that I shall never forget how kind he has been."

Mrs. Wilson was much moved as she promised. To her that dingy outlying district was but a station on the downward way of Fanny's journey through the wide world. It was an old story, the widow thought, and must have the old termination.

"I will come and see you sometimes," the widow said, kissing Fanny for the twentieth time that morning. Now that the hour of separation was really come Mrs. Wilson almost repented, and her heart smote her for sending out that forlorn, friendless girl amongst strangers.

She was more than once on the point of saying, "stay, my child, and be unto me as a daughter;" but then she remembered Arthur, and womanly compassion dropped, frozen, into the deep cold well of a mother's ambition.

"You had better not," said Fanny. "I had rather go my own way, please. You do not know how painful my duty is, and how much more painful it is made by the very kindness with which friends interpose."

"But should you require help, you will send for me, or write!—promise me that. And I am sorry to part with you, Frances."

"I know—I know; but it is best."

"Should you ever meet Arthur," she said, with some slight hesitation, as if her better nature rebelled against the cowardice and mistrust of her request, "it will be better not to speak to him; safer to treat him as a stranger."

Fanny's truthful, large brown eyes looked at her with a momentary, steadfast smile—a smile that answered her.

"He is all I love in the world," Mrs. Wilson urged in deprecation; "and I could not bear to see him made unhappy, wretched, as some men are wrecked by"—

"By an unworthy passion—is that what you mean? You need not fear me, Mrs. Wilson. It is impossible not to like your son, for all women like the generous and brave. But I love the father of my child—he has my whole heart, now and for ever. He may cherish it, or he may trample on it, but there the love will be, whether in joy or in agony."

"Your faith will win him back."

"I have not lost him," said Fanny, proudly. "Good-bye, Mrs. Wilson. I hope the day will come when I may show you that I was not altogether unworthy of your kindness."

"I hope so too," was the sincere reply. "And here, my child—the good time may not come just yet—you will want this."

She placed a small packet in Fanny's hand.

"What is it?"

"The money you have paid me since you came. Do not be proud with me and push it away. I do not want to give it you, but you can remain my debtor for the present."

"I thank you very much, but I would rather not take it, I am sure to hear of him soon, and he will not let me want."

"You can return it when you hear of him. Put it in your purse, and mind you send to me should you require help at any time."

Fanny put the packet in her purse, as Mrs. Wilson would not take it back. In truth, the money was welcome; for Fanny had very little left.

They said "good-bye," and Fanny went to her cab. Mrs. Wilson cried as she closed the door. It seemed like shutting out that fair young creature, and leaving her at the world's mercy.

The cab drove slowly out of Paxton-street, and Fanny felt as if the change in her destiny was coming when the place that had grown familiar faded in the distance. Had not baby, delighted with the motion of the vehicle, laughed and crowed with infantile glee Fanny would have wept all the way.

Mr. Wilson reached Paxton-street at his usual time that afternoon. The dinner, too, was on the table, but it was only laid for two. He noticed the change immediately.

"Why, you have forgotten Mrs. Percy, mother."

"No, my son. She will not be here."

"Gone out, I suppose!" he said, in a disappointed tone. "I thought she had no friends to visit!"

Something in the matron's grave, silent face made him suspect the truth.

"Mother," he said; "is she gone?"

"Yes; she is gone."

"You have sent her away?"

Mrs. Wilson inclined her head quietly in assent.

"I have sent her away."

"Cruel—unjust," he said, indignant for the first time in his life with the parent he revered.

"Where is the Christian charity of feeling, the

gentle kindness I loved in you? Why did you send the poor girl from her refuge here?"

"It was my duty, Arthur." And the grave, sweet solemnity of tone subdued him. "I saw the change coming—the barrier growing up between me and my son; between my son and his future, and I have put that barrier down."

He turned away. He could not be angry with the great and mighty love that spared nothing so that he did not suffer.

"Poor girl!" he murmured. "Poor girl! I will find her, come what may."

Fanny did not find Pimlico so unpleasant as the days were on and she grew accustomed to the change. She missed Arthur's society most of all—the pleasant evenings with books and music and intellectual conversation; there were none of those in Maple-street, Pimlico.

There was the landlady in place of Mrs. Wilson—a little careworn woman with a host of children badly governed, unruly, noisy, and deadly enemies to cleanliness.

There was a surly husband who spent his days in hard work and his evenings at the public-house, and did not use choice language when he came home; and there was a German concertina, badly out of tune, which an uncombed lad of thirteen ground daily for several hours. That lad and that precious concertina were a sad change from Arthur and the harmonium.

It would have been unendurable had not the lad and the instrument reminded her of her brother, young Bill West; only Bill was older, and could play.

Indeed, the whole aspect of Maple-street associated itself with Falkland-row. The houses were taller, and had small areas, in which the lesser children played, and got as much fresh air as could descend to them; but the inhabitants were of the Falkland-row type.

Sitting at her window, watching the crowds of children in the narrow street playing with a reckless regard of life and limb—hearing the sharp voices of impatient mothers, who, without the slightest capacity for self-control, tried to govern their children by means of dreadful threats that meant nothing, and blows bestowed generally at the wrong time, and too heavily, Fanny could not help thinking of the old times and the old friends—Emily White, her sometime bosom friend and workroom companion, and Fred Crosby—honest, manly Fred Crosby, with the hard hand, the rough tongue, and the true heart.

Maple-street had one advantage—it was near the park. She went there every day to give baby an airing. He grew heavy and tired her, but the little fellow was too precious to be trusted in any arms but her own.

She would sit under the trees in her favourite seat at the end of her favourite walk, near the Serpentine. She would sit there, in her somewhat faded elegance, and wonder how the dream of his life would end—whether Percy would come back before her little store of money was quite gone.

One day, when Fanny sat there at sunset deep in reverie, the firm and heavy footstep of a man came down the gravelled path. It was a familiar footstep, and blended with the memories that then filled her mind; but the impression it made was too dim to make her lift her eyes, till a well-known voice spoke a name she had not heard for many a day.

"Fanny—Fanny West!"

It was Fred Crosby, just returning from work—his apron folded carelessly round his waist, and a tool basket slung over his shoulder. Fanny was sorry he had come that way; yet she was glad to see him.

CHAPTER XVIII.

HONEST-HEARTED.

Fred had a momentary doubt of Fanny's identity before he spoke. The figure on the seat seemed familiar to him, but the pretty face and graceful figure had grown refined in the eighteen months that had elapsed since she left Falkland-row. Good associations and culture had done their work.

The young man's glance went from Fanny to

her child, and then rested rather sadly on her left hand. He did not believe that she had a right to wear the plain gold ring he saw there.

She was dressed well, and there was an unconscious superiority in her manner that made Fred feel she had always been above him, but there was a gentle sorrow in her eyes, a half-regretful shame in her face, that made Fred's heart throb with pity.

"And how have you been all this long time?" he asked, in a voice much troubled with emotion. "Why, it's nigh two year since I last saw you, Fanny. Many and many a time I've wondered whether I should ever see you again."

Fanny looked at him, and tried to smile. The simple pathos of his manner touched her.

"Will you shake hands with me?" he asked, setting down his tool basket, and extending his right hand wistfully.

Fanny laid hers in it affectionately. "I was thinking about you, Fred, just when you came along."

"Were you now?" he said, in delight. "That's strange; for I never come this way without thinking of you. Don't you remember how we used to take our walks here with Bill and your cousin Susie? We always came this way."

Fanny did remember. She had outgrown the old life, with its simple enjoyments; but it was pleasant to have the old life recalled. She wanted to hear of her kindred in Falkland-row, and she thought Fred could tell her everything.

But a leaven of the old pride still clung to her, and she hardly liked to be seen in conversation with a carpenter in his working dress. Fred seemed to read her thoughts, for he said gently,—

"The seats are public, Fanny, and no one need know I am talking to you. I have only just come from work, you see, and I didn't think of seeing you."

Fanny made room for him by her side.

"Sit down, Fred. I was not thinking of your dress. Do you ever see father or any of them at home now?"

"Not often. I don't work at Falkland's. I am on my own account, and doing very well at jobbing. Father and I have as much as we can do, and it's all the year round with us."

"Then you never see them?"

"Yes, I do. I often drop in and have a pipe with Bill and the old man. Things haven't changed much. Your going away made all the difference that's been, and it's made your mother ten years older. Oh, Fanny! you had better have thought more of me."

"It is too late to talk of that, Fred. We cannot recall the past."

"But we can forget it," he said, with unconscious feeling. "When you first went away I was nearly wild. I did no work for weeks, and spent every shilling I had saved."

"That was very wrong."

"How could I help it? I had no heart for anything. You never cared much for me, so you can't very well tell how much I cared for you. But I know it broke me up. It's a good thing I never came across young Mr. Falkland—it will be a good thing if I never do. I always said he would be a villain, and so he has."

"How do you mean?"

"Why, you will never see him again. Hasn't he deserted you, after bringing you into trouble? I always said he would."

Fanny's heart sank heavily.

"You must have been misinformed," she said, brave to the last in her faith, "and I cannot permit you to speak of Mr. Falkland in such terms. If you do so again I shall beg of you to leave me."

Her ladylike air of pride subdued Fred instantly.

"That's right," he said, between his teeth, "stick to him of course. He's a gentleman, and whatever he does must be right. You'll know better some day, Fanny, and when you do, don't forget me. I believe you are as good a girl as ever; and if you would give me your word never to speak to him again I'd trust you, and ask you to be my wife."

"I know you are a good fellow, Fred, but you misjudge me."

"I wish I did. I did think what has passed

would cure me, but now that I am near you I feel fonder of you than ever. There's a good home for you, Fanny. I make nearly two pounds ten a-week one way and the other, and I'd be as kind to your baby as if he were my own. A man can't say more."

Fanny pressed his hand to silence him. She knew that his love must be strong to conquer the homely pride of an English artisan, and make him willing to give her the shield of his good name; but it pained her to think she had fallen in his eyes.

"What have you heard about Mr. Falkland," she asked, "that made you say he had deserted me?"

"What everyone's heard. That he's arranged for his father to give you a certain sum of money, and have nothing more to do with you."

"Who told you so?"

"Your brother Bill. Mr. Percy hadn't been gone a week when that was settled. He wasn't to write to you and you wasn't to write to him, or if you did he wasn't to read or answer your letters. That's what your father and old Falkland agreed upon."

Fanny shivered inwardly. Earth and sky seemed to heave, and the trees swam in a mist before her sight. If Fred Crosby told the truth all her happiness was gone. The hope she had clung to, the faith she cherished, were but dreams.

She sat quite still—so still, with such a fixed expression in the half-parted lips—such a deadly whiteness in her cheek that Fred was frightened. She almost let the baby slip from her hold, but Fred caught it, and put his arm round her waist to sustain her.

"I thought you had heard it all before," he said, "or I would not have spoken a word for the world. It's made you ill."

"No—only for a moment. I am better now."

The girl took her baby from him, and rose quite steadily. The girl was too proud to let the old humble lover witness her emotion. The blow fell heavily. She had feared that something of the kind had taken place.

"You need not say that you have seen me," she said, with a winning sweetness that always conquered Fred.

"No; but will you let me take you home? You know, Fanny, you'd be better there."

She shook her head.

"Not yet."

"Yes, but you would. What's the use of playing at hide and seek with those who want to take care of you? There was your father when he saw you that morning in Baker-street—he thought to be sure you would stay there, and sent your mother up in the afternoon, and you were gone. It isn't right, Fanny, is it now?"

Fanny walked on.

"Good evening, Fred."

"Yes; but that's not what I want. Where are you going to, and what are you going to do? Don't leave me like that."

Still she walked on.

"Fanny," he said, strong in his manly purpose, "if you will see me again and let me reason with you I will promise not to breathe a word to anyone. If you will wait here for an hour I'll go home and change my dress and come back, and I won't follow you nor try to find out where you live. Will you stay?"

The girl reflected. If she could depend on Fred's promise she might hear a more detailed account of what had happened. It was in any case best to promise him, or, in his dogged obstinacy of character, he would track out her place of residence, as he had done before.

"I cannot stay this evening," she said, pausing; "but I am here every day at about this time."

"Will you be here to-morrow?"

"Yes; if you promise not to break my confidence."

"Never a word from me," he said, "let who will try to get it. Ah, Fanny! all will come right yet, if you only keep your word and learn to think of him as he deserves."

"I shall do that," answered Fanny, with a smile and a meaning he never intended she

should attach to his words, "and we may still be friends, Fred, if you do not mention that you have seen me."

"I won't to anyone."

"You caused me a great deal of trouble by following us to St. John's-wood."

"Did I? Well, I am very sorry; but I did it for the best. I know you caused me a deal of trouble by going there. I shall never forget standing outside the house, looking through the blind, seeing you and him singing together, so happy as you seemed then. I knew it could not last."

"You prophesied with the commonplace wisdom of the world," thought Fanny, "and the commonplace wisdom of the world is nearly always correct. People seem to think it impossible for one to step out of the beaten path without losing one's way."

She gave her hand to Fred, and said,—

"To-morrow evening, if the weather is fine."

"I shall be here, no fear, and you will think over what I told you. Father and I are getting a good business together, and I can offer you as good a home as any working man's wife or daughter need expect. It ain't those who are best off who are happiest."

"Good evening, Fred, and thank you. I know you speak in the purest kindness."

"And the purest love too, Fanny."

She smiled, and went on. Fred shouldered his basket again, and watched her fine figure sweep up the path with a slight misgiving.

"Somehow, I am afraid she's out of my style," he mused; "a cut or two above me, as the saying is. Then the way she speaks and looks; no one would think she was a girl of old Bill West's. There's no would-if-you-could sort of thing about her—no using long words and putting on airs that anyone with half an eye can see ain't real. Fanny's a born lady—it comes natural to her, and when she's my wife she shall be treated like one."

Fred went home thinking of the morrow evening, and the meeting it was to bring with Fanny. The honest-hearted fellow was sincere in his intention—he was more in love with Fanny than ever.

But she was wiser in her judgment. Fred was no longer of her kind—between herself and the young carpenter there was a wide social gulf—a difference of ideas, habits, and associations. Had Fanny really been the victim he thought her, and he had sheltered her with his good name, they never could have been happy.

"He thinks he could, poor fellow!" thought Fanny. "But if such a thing were within the limits of possibility, what a life mine would be with him. His homely, honest truths would keep me in a state of torture. The fault that he would promise to overlook for the sake of making me his wife he would taunt me with in after years; and I could not blame him. How can he, with his rude, untaught ignorance, understand the delicate consideration that breathes in every act and word of such men as Arthur Wilson?"

Poor Fred suffered by that comparison. Fanny felt that to Fred she would never be anything higher than old Bill West's daughter—a working man's child, and, according to Fred's idea, a working man's wife, by right of lowly birth and lot. To Arthur Wilson she was a lady—a beautiful being, with a soul that could hold communion with his own.

"No," she mused, "thank Heaven that such a destiny is not mine. How well I remember dear Percy's words when he spoke of convention—the things that keep us in the beaten track, and because we are born lowly would have us remain lowly to the end of time. 'It will give you,' he said, 'to a respectable young journeyman, with six-and-thirty shillings a week when in work, and semi-starvation, with an unlimited supply of small children, when work is not to be had.' Perhaps I ought to have been content," she added; "my mother was content with less, and she has always been happy with father. But I am not like mother, and I cannot help it."

The girl felt that, had she married a poor and uneducated man, she could not have done her duty. Like many in the multitude of

women, she was gifted or cursed with instincts that were too delicate for her position. She did not reason with herself deeply enough to see that had she married a working man her intelligence would have refined him, and her ambition impelled him to rise.

CHAPTER XIX.

THINKING OF WORK.

THE dingy rooms in Pimlico had never seemed so dingy as on this evening when Fanny returned to them. They were dreary with the shadow of her dying hope, desolate as the world was desolate if Percy had forsaken her.

She could clearly see that there was a grave misunderstanding, and she traced its course to that unfortunate morning when her father found her in Baker-street. Fanny had cultivated a quiet power of reasoning from her intimacy with such men as Percy and Mr. Wilson, and she called it into play in this instance.

"I think I can see what has happened," she mused, with a calmness that was very like despair. "It was Mr. Falkland who sent father to me, and then father sent mother to take me home. Perhaps Mr. Falkland looked upon my going home as a fact accomplished, and wrote to Percy as if it were."

"A sum of money," she went on, her lip curling bitterly, "arranged between Percy's father and mine, and on such conditions—I wonder that he had the heart to accept them—never to write to me, never to read my letters; but be content with the thought that I had gone back to the wretched house in Falkland-row—with his child, too!"

Then she wept a little. It was so hard to give up her dreams of love, her faith in Percy's chivalry; hard to think he had so readily accepted the sacrifice she had opposed.

"He must know I should be too proud to go home," she said, "to claim a pittance paid to my father to recompense for my imaginary shame. I would rather work my fingers to the bone, or starve, or die—as if I could go home while they think of me as they do!"

It was the first time she had ever entertained an angry thought of Percy; but his conduct seemed so mean after what had passed—his fervent, tender passion, his high appreciation of her character.

Fanny felt that, even were she steeped to the lips in the bitterest adversity she could not go back to the humble house from which she had strayed away.

After a while the sense of injury grew more subdued, and she tried to look more cheerfully at the circumstance.

It was not improbable that Percy was powerless to act in the matter—that his father took the case entirely into his own hands, and left Percy no alternative.

Still she thought he might have written to her now and then. Some of her letters must have reached him, and he must be aware that she had not returned to Falkland-row with her father; or perhaps, as it suddenly occurred to her, he had not, after the intimation that she was home again, called at the Horse-Gössel post-office for any of her letters, and of course he would not write to her in the little house in Lambeth.

"I will wait," she resolved—"wait till he returns, and keep my word, in spite of the worst that may come. He left plenty of money with me, and thinks I am well provided for, by the arrangement with my father. Heaven only knows what they have told him. I will wait with patience, and he shall have nothing to reproach me with."

The truth grew more tangible as she pondered over it. She wondered it had never presented itself to her in that light before. There was no other way of accounting for his protracted silence.

Percy, labouring under the delusion that she was safe in the care of her friends, and well provided for by his father, was content to let matters take their course, and wait with patience till he could acknowledge her.

Her reverie took a more hopeful turn as it went on. Percy, she thought, might have been working for her during the long time of his silence—working so that he might be independent of Falkland the elder, win a position of his own, and be enabled to claim his wife without fear of the consequences.

If it were so, it was easy to understand that he would write no line nor make any sign that would give the proud old man a clue to the truth.

"Percy's chance of success lies in the success of that contract," and her eyes brightened through the glisten of tears, "and of course, if he were to offend his father that stern old man might withdraw him from the work. That is how it is. How stupid—how unkind of me to misjudge him. I had no right to listen to Fred Crosby, nor to anyone. I had no right to believe anything. My husband would never forgive me if he thought I had doubted him. I can hardly forgive myself."

Fanny determined, on consideration, that she had better not see Fred Crosby next evening.

She was well aware that Percy, though he was too proud for jealousy, and had perfect faith in her, would disapprove of her meeting her old, humble sweetheart by appointment, no matter what the motive, and she resolved wisely to hear nothing that, in the nature of a secret, would require to be kept from him.

Little things, innocent enough in themselves, but sure to be productive of soreness of spirit, are sure to slip out at unguarded moments. Even the most discreet have unguarded moments.

So poor Fred, dressed in his Sunday best, walked up and down that well-trodden gravel path for several hours on that next evening. He was very patient over it. He had hurried home from work, and dressed himself with much nervous rapidity, and it was hard to be disappointed after all.

He grew rather tired when the sun went down; he had trodden out his own footprints over and over again, and rested several times on the seat where he sat with Fanny on the previous evening, and still she did not come.

The same people passed and repassed him, the same swans sailed up the river, and the same tall Life Guardsman walked peacefully by the side of the same nursemaid with the same perambulator; there was even the same fanatic in a minute outrigger, pulling himself into shape and out of breath, precisely as he had done twenty-four hours before.

And there were no signs of Fanny. The fanatic left his outrigger; the nursemaid went home; her tall and peaceful warrior-lover departed to his beer and singing-room, and the swans sailed up to the quiet waters beyond the chains. The stars came out; first in single silver dots, then in faint clusters, but Fanny did not appear.

"It's too bad," said Fred. "She often used to play me tricks when that Emily White was with her; keep me waiting at some corner while they went another way; but I thought she was serious last night. She made a fool of me, promised to come just to get rid of me."

He grew reckless, and lit his pipe; turned the skirts of his frock-coat aside, and stuck his hands in his trousers pockets. He put his hat low on his forehead, and strode up and down the path defiantly. It would have fared ill with anyone who ran against Mr. Frederick Crosby just then.

"Yes," he muttered, savagely, "she's too much of a lady for me, even as she is. She will stick to that villain to the very last, and when he deserts her for good it will serve her right. She won't get any pity from me then."

The young carpenter felt deeply aggrieved before he spoke in that strain. He was disappointed. His love for Fanny was filled with a tenderness quite beyond his power of expression. He knew how much he cared for her. The mind was superior to the man, and the mind pictured to him what a pleasant home his home would be if Fanny was there as Mrs. Fred. The instinct within him understood how her delicate grace and refinement would give tone and beauty to his fireside.

(To be continued.)

FACETIE.

ELLA: "You ought to have seen Jack when he proposed." Stella: "Oh, I've seen him."

"Is he a lover of music?" "I think not. At least, he never evinces any reluctance to sing."

DASHWAY: "strange that Castleton will never accept a cigar I offer him." Claverton: "He must have done so once."

"THERE is one sign that should be placed over every letter-box in the city." "What is that?" "Post no bills."

DOUBSON: "Can your daughter play the piano?" Subbubs (wearily): "I don't know whether she can or not, but she does."

JINES: "I understand you were pretty well off before you were married?" Blinks: "Yes; but I didn't know it."

SHE: "A woman at thirty has no future." HE: "True. No matter how long she lives she will still be thirty."

"It's almost disgusting to see the manulatrains Miss Whirlie takes on." "What is she doing now?" "Learning to sharpen a lead pencil."

"THEY married in haste," said he. "And, of course, repented at leisure," said she. "No." "No." "No. They repented the same way."

MCWATERS: "When was your wife's last birthday?" McSwitters: "A good many years ago."

PALL MALL: "Isn't that a very expensive suit Dickey Neverpay has on?" St. James's: "Yes; for his tailor."

WIFE: "There comes that tramp I gave some of my biscuits to the other day." Husband: "Impossible! This must be his ghost."

HE: "My views on bringing up a family." SHE: "Never mind your views, dear. I'll bring up the family. You go and bring up the coal."

MR. SHORTLY (Mr. Sin, to Miss Beauti): "Yes, I am proud to say I am a self-made man." Miss Beauti's Little Brother: "Why didn't you make more of you while you were about it?"

MRS. DE FASHION: "Who is this Mrs. New-comer who has moved into the house next door to you? Is she respectable?" Mrs. De Style: "Oh, perfectly. She married for money."

HOUSEKEEPER: "Half the things you wash are torn to pieces." Washerwoman: "Yes, mum; but when a thing is torn in two or more pieces, I count them as only one piece, mum."

BACON: "I knew that man Carr would make his way to the front." Edgar: "And has he?" "Why, yes; he started as a conductor on a South London tramcar, and now he's a driver!"

MRS. SWANSDOWN (at the ball): "I wonder what is the name of that fellow I just danced with?" Miss Taffeta: "I heard him call himself a martyr."

SERVANT (to lady who arrived a little late at the sewing circle): "Excuse me, madam, but I'd advise you to wait a few minutes. Just now they are talking about you."

"Who's your friend?" he asked, as his companion paused and lifted his hat to a lady who drove by. "That isn't a friend," said the other man, absent-mindedly. "That's my wife."

"Is young Flyingwedge practising law?" inquired Brown. "I think not. He was admitted to the bar, but I think he is practising economy," Jones replied.

GOSLING: "Barber, my skin is tender. I wish you'd shave me down, not up." Irish Barber: "Down, is it? Sure, sor, there's nothing else but down to shave!"

PRACTICAL AGENT: "Do you think you are qualified to become the wife of a poor man?" Sweet Girl: "Oh, yes; it's all fixed. We are to live in a cottage, and I know how to make cottage-pudding."

A GOOD old Scotch lady once asked her nephew, a poor preacher, whom nobody cared to hear: "James, why did you enter the ministry?" "Because I was called," he replied. "James," said the old lady, anxiously, "are you quite sure it wasn't some other noise you heard?"

AUTHOR: "I have come to ask you what you think of my melodrama!" Theatrical Manager (handing it back): "It's too mellow, my friend; it's spoiled."

WINSTON: "What do people mean when they say of a girl that she is 'quaint'?" Wonston: "They mean usually that it is charitable not to express their real opinion of her."

HONORARY GUEST: "I'd like to have a sprig of parsley with this shloin." Waiter: "Sorry, sir, but the bunch of parsley we've been using to-day was set up by the last man that had steak."

JONES's baby has not lived very long. "Dear me! I am sorry to hear that. What was the cause of death?" "Dead! Who said it was dead? I said it had not lived long. It was born only last week!"

"I UNDERSTAND the critics showed your poems a great deal of consideration," said the caustic young woman. "Why, they didn't say a word about them," replied the young man. "That's what I meant."

VISITOR (at blind asylum): "I thought this institution was for both sexes, but I see only men here. Have you no female inmates?" Matron: "Oh, plenty of them; but they've all been rented out for chaperons."

LADY: "Is Mrs. Brown at home?" Maid-of-all-work: "No'm." "Can you tell me when she will be at home?" "As soon as she gets the drawing-room dusted, mum, an' she's almost finished now."

"WHAT is more awful to contemplate," said a lecturer, glaring about him, "than the relentless power of the maelstrom?" And a henpecked-looking man in the rear of the building softly replied, "Femalestrom."

"MAMMA, when Willie has a toothache, you take him to the dentist to have it filled, don't you?" asked Tommy. "Yes, dear," said mamma. "Well, I've got a stummickache. Don't you think we'd better go to the confectioner's?"

DORA: "How do you like my new slippers?" CORA: "They're sweet! I shall have to get a pair like them." Dora: "I am afraid you are too late. When I got these yesterday there were no larger sizes left."

BESBY: "Have you named the baby yet?" TEASER: "No; and I'm not going to." Besby: "What! not going to name the baby?" Teaser: "I didn't say that. I said I wasn't going to name it 'yet.' I intend to call him John."

THE small son and heir had been sent into the garden to fetch a stick with which he was to be punished. After some delay he returned, saying, with a sigh: "Couldn't find a stick, mow; but here's a little stone you might frow at me."

MRS. NUWED (returning from an absence of two weeks): "Are you really and when I'm away, Ferdinand?" Mr. Nuwed (who means every word of it): "Matilda, I never really appreciated what married life was until you had left me."

FATHER FLYING: "Why don't you have your pigstye further from your house, Googan?" Googan: "Phwat for, yer reverence?" "Because it's unhealthy." "Divil a bit, yer reverence! The pig has never had a sick day since he was born."

"MR. STALATE," she murmured, "do you remember when in 1894, we sat up to watch the new year come in?" "Yes," he replied, rapturously. "Well—don't you—don't you—" "Don't I what?" "Don't you think we are beginning rather early this year?"

THE wayward man had fallen in the street in a swoon. The usual crowd gathered, and the usual man-who-knows-what-to-do-thought "Stand back and give him air." The wayward man got up. "Air!" said he with fine scorn. "Air! What yer talking about! When I ain't had nothin' but air for three days!"

BUSINESS MAN: "Can you write shorthand?" Applicant: "Yes, sir." "How many words a minute?" "I never counted 'em; but the other day, when my wife found in my overcoat pocket a letter which she gave me to post last week, I took down every word she uttered as fast as she said them." "You'll do."

A: "WHAT'S the matter? You look very serious." B: "Well, that's the way I feel. I've just lost a hundred pounds on the Stock Exchange." A: "Oh, cheer up, old fellow, and take things as they come." B: "Great Scott, man! any fool can take things as they come. What I find it hard to do is to part with things as they go."

A PROFESSOR wrote a paper entitled "Ancient Methods of Filtration," which was advertised as "Ancient Methods of Filtration." He was chaffed by a lady friend on the mistake. "Oh, professor, do give us your lecture on 'Ancient Methods of Filtration.'" "Ah, Miss —," answered the professor, who was a bachelor, "that lecture can only be delivered to a single auditor at a time, and must be illustrated with experiments."

A CERTAIN old Scotch lady was once protesting against the resignation of her pastor. The worthy man tasted sweetness in her words, but wishing modestly to comfort her in the thought that all was not lost in his departure, bid her not to worry. "You'll get a better man after I'm gone." But how was the fine edge of her compliment taken off by her remonstrating reply: "Na, na! We've had four pastors already, and every one's been worse than the rest!"

"THE last time I met your dear husband he stopped and spoke to me with such a sunny greeting that I was the happier for it all day long," said a sympathetic plain friend to an inconsolable young widow. "Yes, that was just like David," she replied, still oblivious to everything except her loss. "There was no woman so humble, or homely, or unattractive, or dull, but that he could find something pleasant to say to her, and would take pains to say it."

DURING the recent cold weather a benevolent lady had the kindness to open a soup kitchen for the relief of some of the poor children of the district. One cold morning, after having filled their basins full of steaming hot broth, she noticed one little boy, who having been among those first served, had already finished his portion, whereupon she at once proceeded to ask him if he would care to have any more. "What!" said the ungrateful youngster, "more soup! When's the fish coming on!"

MR. DUMBLETON, who is too economical to keep any extra collar buttons on hand, and who devotes a good share of his matin moments to hunting for those wayward essentials of male attire, startled his wife the other morning by a more than usual overflow of emphatic language. "What's the matter now?" she asked. "Matter enough!" he returned with a series of paralytic gasps. "I've swallowed my collar button!" "Thank goodness!" snapped out Mrs. Dumbleton. "For once in your life you know where it is."

ASKER: "What is that curious machine that Lord So-and-so has had constructed in your recommendation?" He tells me the thing cost a lot of money, but he is delighted at its beneficial effect on his health. "What is it for?" Emdee (Lord So-and-so's medical adviser): "The machine is intended to pump fresh air from outside into the close and stuffy library where his lordship spends most of his time." Asker: "Yes, but wouldn't it do just as well if the windows were opened?" Emdee: "Certainly; but my occupation as his lordship's family doctor would be gone if I dared to suggest anything so simple."

MRS. DE TUFFTHURST: "Amelia, I do wish you would not encourage this persistent young Ardup to come here so often—" Mrs. Amelia: "Why, mamma, haven't you heard? A distant relative of Mr. Ardup's has just died, leaving him a splendid house, £20,000 in money, and—" Mrs. De Tuffthurst: "I must request you, Amelia, not to interrupt me when I am speaking. I was about to remark that I wish you would not encourage Mr. Ardup to come here so often, unless you reciprocate the feelings he evidently entertains for you, in which case, of course, I have nothing further to say. I have every reason to believe Mr. Ardup to be an excellent young man."

SOCIETY.

THE Duke and Duchess of York will go back to York Cottage on June 1st for about a fortnight.

THE first State Concert and the first State Ball will take place at Buckingham Palace shortly before Whit Sunday. The second ball and the second concert are not to be given until the beginning of July.

It is stated that the Queen's sister-in-law, the Duchess Dowager of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha, has accepted an invitation given her by the Queen to visit her at Windsor or Balmoral.

THE Prince Regent of Bavaria has resolved to erect a magnificent votive chapel, at the cost of some £20,000, on the borders of the lake of Starnberg, close to the spot where the ill-starred King Louis was drowned.

THE Duchess and her daughters will reside at the Chateau de Rheinhardbrunn in the Thuringian Forest, during July and August, and the Duke will join them there after his "cure" at Kissingen.

It is the custom in Rome when children are being buried that the bears used be all white, picked out with gold; the coachmen, bearers, footmen, &c., are all dressed in white and gold, with white powdered wigs, the whole equipage giving one the idea of being about to take part in some masquerade or gala ceremony.

It is probable that the betrothal of the young Princess Alexandra of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha to Prince Ernest of Hohenlohe-Langenburg, eldest son of Prince Hohenlohe-Langenburg, Statthalter of Alsace-Lorraine, will shortly take place. The bridegroom in *posse* is already connected with our Royal family by birth, as he is a grandson of Princess Feodora of Hohenlohe, daughter of the Duchess of Kent by her first marriage to the Prince of Leiningen, and half-sister of the Queen. The Princess Alexandra is not seventeen until September 1st, but is already accomplished and charming, the Duchess of Coburg taking care that all her children are trained from their earliest childhood to take their places in the great world without any *mauvaise honte* or undue diffidence. Prince Ernest will be thirty-two on September 18th.

THE two Continental railway carriages used by the Queen, forming saloon and bedroom are very richly upholstered in a beige-coloured silk with silver thread, and woven with the design of the rose, shamrock, and thistle. In this saloon there is a high blue silk arm-chair for the Queen, and a lower arm-chair for Princess Beatrice, and a long blue settee with cushions, and an extra chair for Princess Victoria. Beyond this saloon, at the extremity, are two fixed chairs, easily converted into beds, and here the footman and Scotch attendant live and sleep when travelling. On the other side there is a small passage, which joins the saloon with the Queen's bed and dressing-room; beyond this are the maids' sleeping accommodation and lavatory. There are two beds for the Queen and her daughter smaller than a hospital bed. But more room cannot be given on narrow-gauge lines. The whole is beautifully upholstered, ventilated from the top, and as the outside air can come in, so also does the black smoke from the engine, for the silver beige silk-padded ceiling is near the ventilator and quite dirty. The water for the lavatories is in tanks on the roofs of the carriages. Electric bells are placed near all the seats and beds, one to communicate with the men-servants, and another with the maids. A ladder is carried in the van so as to admit of an easy descent at the stations. The whole arrangement cost £5,000 some twenty years ago, and has a special attendant to look after it all the year round. This attendant is a Belgian working engineer, and in case of the slightest mishap he is at hand to remedy it. Every two hours during the Queen's journey, the train stops for five minutes, and always travels less quickly during the night. Besides which, the train is always stationary during the Queen's evening and morning toilet.

STATISTICS.

OUR railway tunnels cost on an average £200 a yard.

THE modern system of fortification was adopted about 1500.

To keep a racehorse in even moderate condition, with proper attendants, costs about £325 a year.

FROM 1867 to 1881 Russia sent 624,000 persons to Siberia, fully 100,000 relatives of prisoners having accompanied the exiles of their own free will.

THE rainiest part in the world is Ocherapting, in Assam, where the average rainfall for fifteen years has been 492 inches. In 1861 it was 905.

GEMS.

CHANCE generally favours the prudent.

JUSTICE to one is mercy to thousands.

THE rich are more envied by those who have a little than by those who have nothing.

AN obstacle is not something put in a man's path to block him; it is something put there to make him climb up and over, if he cannot move it away.

IN the good and great man the noble enthusiasm of early life is mellowed and tempered by the reason and judgment of later years, and the result is invaluable. Both conditions are good, both natural, neither should be depreciated; they are the marks of the finest type of man—the one in his youth, the other in maturity.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

CRUMBED PATTIES.—Fill small patty pans with oysters, season with pepper, salt and several whole allspice. Spread the top with bread-crumbs which have been fried in butter, and bake in a hot oven five minutes. Put sprigs of parsley on each patty.

STEAMED EGGS.—Butter a deep pie tin, and break carefully into it as many eggs as needed. Sprinkle them with pepper, salt and bits of butter; place them in a steamer over boiling water until done. This will be found better than poaching them, especially if cooked for an invalid.

BAKED PRUNE PUDDING.—Wash one pound of prunes. Cover with a pint of cold water and soak over night. Put two tablespoonfuls of sago into one pint of water and soak also over night. Next morning add to the prunes the juice of one lemon, one cup of sugar and the soaked sago. If it is desired, the prunes may be stoned before adding the other ingredients. Mix well and turn into a baking dish. Cover the top of the dish and stand in the oven for twenty minutes. Then remove the cover and let it remain ten minutes longer. Serve with plain cream.

BAKED SHAD-ROE.—Wash a roe, and putting it into a stewpan with one teaspoonful of salt and a quart of boiling water, cook for ten minutes. Take the roe from the boiling water and, putting it in a bowl of cold water, cut it in slices about an inch thick. When cold, wipe dry and season with half a teaspoonful of salt and a little pepper. Put a heaped tablespoonful of butter in a frying pan and put on the fire. When so hot that it begins to turn brown, add a level tablespoonful of flour and stir. Now draw the pan back to a cooler part of the stove and gradually add half a pint of white stock-veal or chicken. Season this with a little salt, a grain of cayenne pepper and a tablespoonful of lemon-juice. Put the roe in a small scallop dish and pour the sauce over it. Sprinkle a cupful of grated bread-crumbs over the top and strew these with bits of butter. Bake in a moderate oven for twenty minutes and serve in the dish in which it is baked.

MISCELLANEOUS.

THE electric wires of a French railroad are so arranged that they can be used for telegraphing or telephoning.

CAMBRIC was first introduced into England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. The first piece imported was presented to the Virgin Queen to make a ruff for her neck.

IN Jewish marriages the woman is always placed to the right of her mate. With every other nation of the world her place in the ceremony is to the left.

THE widow's cap is as old as the days of Julius Caesar. An edict of Tiberius commanded all widows to wear the cap under penalty of a heavy fine and imprisonment.

THE first work printed on shorthand writing was by Dr. Timothy Bright, of Cambridge, in 1588, who dedicated it to Queen Elizabeth, under the title of "An Act of Short, Swift, and Secret Writing by Character."

THERE are doors in some old houses of Holland which were, in former days, never used except for weddings and funerals. After the bride and groom had passed, the door was nailed up to await the next occasion.

WHEN a prince of the Austrian royal family dies, his horse follows the funeral covered with a black cloth and lame in one hoof. The lameness is produced by driving a nail through the horse-shoe. This is the sign of the deepest possible mourning.

EXHAUSTIVE experiments in the cultivation of tea are soon to be made in Russia. The Czar is personally interested in the plan, and experts are arranging for the cultivation of the plant in the western limits of the Caucasus, where the temperature is much the same as that in which the plant grows in China.

EVERY year a number of boys are sent from Siam by the king to England to learn different things. One learns upholstery, one learns typewriting, one learns languages, one learns science, and so on. When they return to Siam each takes with him some different information to impart to others.

To talk through a human body—or a row of human bodies, for the matter of that—is one of the weirdest of the electrician's feats. If a telephone wire be severed, and the two ends be held by a person, one in each hand, but far apart, it is quite possible for two individuals to carry on a conversation through the body of a medium as readily and as distinctly as if the line had been properly connected.

AMONG civilized nations the wearing of earrings by men has been by no means uncommon, as it has been shown that in early English days some of the most distinguished courtiers bedecked their ears with very costly specimens. Shakespeare is said to have worn them, and Charles I. is reputed to have been the owner of a magnificent pair of pearl earrings, which he bequeathed to his daughter on the day before he was executed.

THE intelligent and persevering Scotch collie is the dog trained for service in the German army. His equipment consists of a strong collar with a leather pocket for letters, a small waterproof blanket for his rest at night, and two pockets containing a small surgeon's outfit, linen, medicines and a small amount of dog biscuit. The entire load is less than ten pounds, and can be easily carried by the dog for days. His services are most important in the search for the wounded or dead; he often brings first help to a soldier fallen in brush or underwood and completely hidden from sight; he makes an excellent courier, and runs from hospital to command or vice versa, faithfully delivering messages intrusted to his care as fast as a cavalierman, with much less danger to both courier and message. A large red cross marks each side pocket, and designates his connection with the sanitary and relief corps. He also carries a small lantern on his back, to enable the litter bearer to follow him in the search for the wounded or dead in the darkness of night.

NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

MARTIN.—Go to a doctor.
E. G.—Really we could not.
J. O. A.—Consult a solicitor.
PHILIP.—A J. P. is a magistrate.
INQUIRY.—We make no charge whatever.
MURIE.—Light grey would not be unbecoming.
G. V.—Purchase a shilling guide to the Civil Service.
LAURENCE.—You had better get it done by a solicitor.
INQUIRITIVE.—We have no knowledge of the individual.
HAROLD.—Write to the secretary; there are several ways.
CONSTANT READER.—A penny stamp is sufficient for the receipt.
LOVER OF THE "LONDON READER."—No convicts are now sent to any part of Australia.
IGNORANT.—It is the superior who gives the cue to the inferior.
HOWARD.—Among a number your bashfulness would escape notice.
GEORGE.—All degrees of cousins, from the first to the last, can lawfully marry.
DOMA.—Your handwriting is very pretty as well as very neat.
AMBITIOUS.—The dramatic art is overcrowded with half starving actors.
INDIGNANT.—You certainly seem to have reasonable grounds for complaint.
R. T.—No means of ascertaining except by writing to the owners direct.
ERNE.—The church spire originated about the eleventh century.
M. S.—Dahomey is the smallest state in Africa. It has 4,000 square miles.
OLD READER.—Apply to the head of the department in Civil Service you wish to join.
DOUBTFUL.—Any police officer may lawfully arrest any person so improperly attired.
X. L.—If the book or sheet you buy has not been copyrighted you can do as you like.
B. P.—If you object to their so doing give notice to the parties to cut them back.
AMBIQUE.—It is quite impossible for us to undertake to give private replies to correspondents.
INCORRIGIBLE.—On such topics people should think deeply before pronouncing decisive opinions.
BETTY.—When fried in the dripping drain them well on a sieve close to the fire; then serve.
GILBERT.—Only about one in a hundred who try to become authors succeed in the perilous attempt.
SOPHIE.—We should advise you to have it done at the dyer's. They understand preserving the colours.
CRIBBON.—Rainbows are sometimes formed at night by the moonlight; but they are not so bright as those seen in the daytime.
JUDITH.—The primrose is one of the earliest flowers of spring, and in the language of flowers denotes childhood.
TATYER.—It would not be etiquette for a gentleman to present flowers to a lady with whom he was only slightly acquainted.
L. S. W.—Money is said to owe its name to Moneta, a title of Juno, in whose temple Roman money was first coined.
CHICKEN.—Borax will soften water for toilet purposes. A teaspoonful of powdered borax to a glassful of water will make about the right solution.
MILDERED.—Practice scales until your intervals are correct, then study easy pieces until you have learned to read without help.
NEN.—It does not last for more than forty years, or seven years after death of the author in any case; you can do what you like with it safely.
F. B.—As long as it is not used for a dishonest purpose you may call yourself by any name you like, quite legally, without registering it in any way.
HOUSEWIFE.—Constant dusting, brushing, and plenty of fresh air are the best preventives. A little used room is their favourite haunt.
TRICKED MOTHER.—Take him to a physician, not a dealer in spectacles—have his eyes examined, and get him glasses if he needs them.
GERARD.—Stalemate in chess is when a player cannot move any piece or pawn without exposing his king to check—the king, of course, not being already in check.
ONE WHO WANTS TO KNOW.—A man found not guilty of a crime in England or Ireland cannot be put on trial again for same crime even though fresh evidence against him is found.
PARTY POLE.—Powdered emery and sweet oil will remove the rust. A short-haired brush with a piece of old felt or carpet under is a good implement, but it is a troublesome job.

S. D.—A red sunset foretells dry weather, because it indicates that the air towards the west, from which quarter rain may generally be expected, contains little moisture.

VARIAN.—Treasure-trove is any money, bullion, and the like, found in the earth, or otherwise hidden, the owner of which is not known. The word comes from treasure and trove, to find.

G. B.—We are not aware of any way in which the young man could work his passage out to South Africa, except he can get a job on board ship as plumber; there are no offers going just now of free passages for any one.

GERTRUDE.—You might try sponging it well over with strong washing soda and water, and at once sponging all traces of the soda off with clean water. Then wipe dry, and allow it to hang till perfectly dry.

WAVESLEY.—You might give the letter to a leading auctioneer to sell, and we think it would command a fair price, but such a handwriting is by no means rare, so do not expect too much.

AMBITIOUS ALBERT.—To become an actor one must have decided natural talent and study very hard. The best way is to go in a good company in some important capacity—grow up in the business as it were.

GLEN ALAN.

With hound and horn, and hunter steed,
 Lord Kelvyn ranges o'er
 The mighty woods; among the oaks,
 Along the velvet clover.

And hunters score with him do ride,
 Though game is scarce and shy;
 But yet on decks his saddle-bow
 While yet the sun is high.

With speech of light and airy tone
 The hunters homeward ride;
 And now a sweet and graceful boy
 Rides at Lord Kelvyn's side.

Glen Alan, in a forest bred,
 Of noble blood and high,
 Knew not his knightly crest and shield
 Till thirteen years went by.

By faithful carles the boy was taught
 To ride, both swift and free;
 To speak the truth; to send the shaft
 Straight to the archer tree.

All on a day when forth they rode
 To hear the mavis sing,
 A neighbour spoke this word of fire!
 "Ride out to meet your king!"

"The foe hath stormed the city where
 The king is wont to hide,
 And he requires of trusty men
 A hundred at his side."

Glen Alan hears the sounding word,
 He hears the clarion's voice;
 He quits the forest shadows, for
 He has no other choice.

Scarce had the boy departed when
 A heavy arrow flew
 And struck Lord Kelvyn's fiery steed—
 The steed his master threw.

So died the father—on the son
 To foreign fields had sped;
 Alas! that such a day to such
 A sorrow could have led!

DISHEARTENED.—An accomplished housekeeper is not made in a day, and good cookery is an art which it takes time to acquire. Those to whom you dispense your hospitalities should be less critical in their observations.

P. H.—The habit of wearing the pigtail has been universal in China since 1644, when the present dynasty came into power by conquest. It was then decreed that all men, of whatever degree or rank, should wear the pig-tail to show their loyalty.

PETER.—After a will has been proved it remains at the Will Registry Office. It may be afterwards inspected by any person on payment of a fee of 1s. and a copy of it obtained on paying 1s. for every seventy words.

JANE.—Slightly diluted hydrochloric acid rubbed on with a brush or feather, and as soon as the stains are removed well rinse the pot with clean cold water; be careful not to drop the acid about, it burns and is poisonous.

ALEX.—It is impossible for you to get out, either to colonies or States, without paying for your passage, nor would your position be improved if you did get out, because trade out there just now is even worse than at home, and as far as the signs go it is likely to revive at home much sooner than in the colonies.

FRANCESCA.—Remember that fashion may be carried to extremes, and that it is not so frequently held up, and justly, too, to ridicule as well as censure. To live in the realm of high society all the time must be very tiresome to society people themselves. He assured that life may be enjoyed without the excesses which are too apt to be indulged in by the devotees of fashion.

DICKY.—The proper title of the Mayor of London is Lord Mayor of London. The title of lord has been used in the City from time immemorial. In the old books of the City the lord mayor is spoken of as the lord mayor, and the aldermen as barons.

INTERESTED.—The straw plait used for hats and bonnets is chiefly made in the counties of Bedford, Bucks, and Hertford. A large quantity is made by young girls at their own homes. Luton, in Bedfordshire, is the centre of the straw bonnet manufacture.

VERY ANXIOUS.—Personal application to such persons as may be likely to need assistance in this line is the only thing we can advise, save, perhaps, the translating of books, which, unless one has orders for them, would be rather risky and unprofitable business.

MARION.—Pensions are supposed to be granted to widows and children who have no other means of support. The pension ceases at the marriage of the widow, and probably would cease at the marriage of a minor child if she had been drawing one for any number of years.

VOLUMINE.—Possibly a little weak solution of oxalic acid applied with a sponge, and then sponged off with clean cold water, might restore the colour, but very often nothing will do it, as it frequently is the result of either quality of material or polish used, or both combined.

FIVE YEARS' READER.—If our associates be cheerful-minded they will help to keep up our spirits, whereas if they be prone to depression and gloom they will sink us deeper in woe and despair. One so sensitive to social influences as you represent yourself to be should select only those possessed of gay hearts for intimate companionship.

YOUNG MOTHER.—Brown bread or crust coffee is excellent for children, and may be served with sugar and cream. It is prepared in a similar manner to toast water, the crusts of brown bread being toasted until very brown, broken into small pieces, and a pint of hot water added to a cupful of the crusts. Steep for ten minutes and strain.

CAROLINE.—The only certain remedy for moths in furniture is to rip out stuffing and destroy the eggs of the insect invaders; but short of that you may go round the edges of the hair or leather covering, raising it sufficiently to let you inject turpentine with a small sponge or brush; hasten the covering again, and we think you will not have much further trouble with the moths.

THEODORA.—Boil a cupful of rice until it is quite soft; then take two eggs, one cupful of powdered sugar, and one cupful of milk and stir all together; then add the rice. Pare six nice apples, slice small, and place them in the bottom of the pudding dish; pour the rice custard over them, and put the dish in a moderately heated oven long enough to bake the apples. Eat the pudding while warm, with or without cream.

B. S.—Draw on a paper the size of the glass the subject you mean to paint. Fasten this at each end of the glass with paste, or any cement to prevent it from slipping. Then with some very black paint, mixed with varnish, draw with a fine camel's hair pencil very lightly the outlines sketched on the paper which are reflected on the glass. When the outlines are dry, colour and shade your figures; but observe to temper your colours with strong white varnish.

MEO.—To mull wine grate half a nutmeg into one pint of any wine preferred, and season to your taste with loaf sugar; set it over the fire, and when it boils stir in it the yolks of four eggs, well beaten; add then first a little cold wine, and then stir them gradually into the heated wine; then pour it all backwards and forwards several times while it is quite hot, and it will become thick. Serve it in coffee-cups with hot toast. Sometimes the wine is poured over the toast.

NEARVOUS NEN.—Fracture differs so much in different localities that it is not easy to give a definition of best man's duties which will fit all places and classes; the best man, of course, is expected to give a present to the bride; if he thinks fit he may also give a present to the bridesmaid, such as gloves, satin slippers, fan or other trifle; but that is optional. He stands at the bridegroom's right hand during the marriage ceremony, the bridesmaid being on the other side of the bride; he withdraws the right-hand glove of the bridegroom when the clergyman requests the parties to join hands; he signs the marriage register as witness, and usually sees to the insertion of the marriage in the paper.

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ALL LETTERS to be Addressed to the Editors of THE LONDON READER, 234, Strand, W.C.

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London: Published for the Proprietor, at 234, Strand, by G. F. CORPSON; and printed by WOODFALL and KIMBER, 70 to 76, Long Acre, W.C.